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FOUR YEARS
IN
PARLIAMENT
WITH
HARD LABOUR.



C. W. RADCLIFFE COOKE.

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FOUR YEARS IN PARLIAMENT
WITH HARD LABOUR.

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WITH HARD LABOUR.

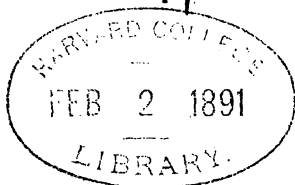
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INTRODUCTION.

It is not bodily exertion to a certainty, for of this we have not enough, nor much mental effort either, that makes the labours of Members of Parliament hard, but rather the sedentary life we lead and the long and late hours we keep. For the last two years, it is true, we have kept earlier hours in the House of Commons than we used to keep before our new rules were passed, when it was customary to sit until two and three o'clock in the morning. I well remember in the course of my maiden speech, which appropriately enough was on the Woman's Suffrage Bill, hazarding the opinion that at the late hour we had then reached—to wit, 1.30 A.M.—we were in too jaded a condition to give due consideration to a measure which involved a vast constitutional change. The expression of this, as it turned out, naïve sentiment raised a general titter. Eye-glasses flashed and I was gazed at with good-humoured curiosity flavoured with contempt, for was it not

clear on the face of it that I was a new Member, and a simple one to boot ! This was in 1886 ; but even now, when we are supposed to close, so to speak, automatically at midnight, we are as a fact often kept longer in order to take the report of Supply, or consider some other matters that are exempted from the operation of the new rules. Besides, as the Session draws to an end and the time at our disposal becomes measurably less, the rules are frequently suspended and we sit quite as late as ever we sat. As a consequence, Members who attend closely to their duties can never be in bed much before one in the morning, and are often kept up an hour or two later. Members who are on Committees—and when the House is in full swing of business, what with Grand Committees and Select Committees, a large number are so occupied—may have to spend from twelve to fourteen hours daily in continuous attendance within the walls of the Palace of Westminster. True, we rise early on Wednesdays, and do not sit on Saturdays, except towards the end of the Session ; but look at the engagement-book of any active Member and you would see how few of these so-called free nights are unappropriated to some function connected with his public position. A great deal of our work, especially that which is

done in the Committees, is highly interesting, and unofficial Members may do as much or as little as they like of it. But take any healthy man and set him to work, mainly by night, in an ill-ventilated, over-heated building at some sedentary pursuit for twelve hours or so at a stretch, and at the end of six months it is reasonable to suppose—even if he have what it has been well said Members of Parliament ought to possess, the strength of a lion and the stomach of an ostrich—that he will not, either physically or mentally, be the man he was at the beginning of that period. These are in brief the conditions of our Parliamentary life, and it is on this account that I term ours hard labour.

The common run of Members, especially those who sit on the Ministerial side of the House, have during their hours of enforced attendance leisure for observation. In Opposition, party discipline is less strict than in office. The leaders of Her Majesty's Opposition—if in these days there can be said to be a body of men answering to that description—often, it is true, deprecate obstruction and announce a desire to further the progress of public business, but they seldom succeed in inspiring their followers with similar accommodating views. It is in Opposition that pushing politicians find the most frequent

opportunities to distinguish themselves. Young hounds must be blooded, and Opposition Leaders who tried to keep the active spirits of their party too tightly in hand would soon lose control of them altogether. Besides, with office looming in a future however distant, it is essential to test in Opposition the capacity of the new recruits. So, many an aspiring politician can cut a conspicuous figure as an opponent of the Government who, were he a supporter, would be doomed to sit mute and inglorious on a back bench. Such a situation as the last named has, however, as I have said, the merit of favouring observation, especially to one not unused to write for the press. Hence the following pages, in which I have endeavoured to record some impressions derived from a brief experience of life in Parliament and of the political functions at which Members of Parliament are expected to assist.

In concluding these introductory remarks I have to express my acknowledgments to the proprietors of the *Times*, the *National Review*, and *Time*, by whose permission the articles in this little book have been revised and reproduced.

C. W. R. C.

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FOUR YEARS IN PARLIAMENT.

SOME PARLIAMENTARY INCIDENTS.

DURING the Session the Palace of Westminster contains for the best part of every day and every night when the House sits a large resident population. It is for the time being their home or their place of business, where anyone who desires to communicate with them may be pretty sure of finding them. This population, consisting of course for the most part of Members of Parliament, lunches, takes tea, dines, sups, and not infrequently sleeps there. There they conduct a voluminous correspondence, interview innumerable visitors, and study in the Library the subjects in which they may severally be interested. When a question is raised as to the inconvenience of the arrangements for the accommodation of this population, it is sometimes urged, as regards Members of Parliament,

that their duty is to be in their places in the House throughout the duration of its sitting, and that consequently any outside accommodation is both unnecessary and undesirable, as tending to divert them from this primary duty. Apart from the preliminary difficulty occasioned by the fact that the Legislative Chamber could not hold, I suppose, more than half of us unless we sat on each other's knees, let me glance briefly at some of the calls on our time and attention which daily interfere with continuous attendance in the House itself. I will take an evening's experience. On entering the lobby shortly before the hour at which the House sits, I make, as we all do, straight for the post office in the opposite corner. "Any letters?" I inquire, hoping against hope for a negative response. No such luck, however. Here they are, quite a sheaf of them. Several contain requests for orders of admission to the gallery. These must be procured before a certain hour from the office of the Speaker's Secretary and despatched to my correspondents. One is an application for clerical preferment which necessitates a letter to the Lord Chancellor. One is an inquiry as to a post in a Government office which may require an interview with a Minister or the writing of a formal note to

him. Several relate to meetings, dinners, clubs, &c., which I am invited to attend or patronize, others to proceedings in and Bills before Parliament, while the rest are mostly prospectuses of companies and advertisements from wine-merchants and money-lenders. I should say, however, that these are by no means the only letters one receives in one's representative capacity. At my club, place of business, and private house, I have packets day by day of a similar character. A considerable proportion of this correspondence can be thrust at once in the waste-paper basket, but the rest must at least be read, and, in most cases, be answered.

By the time that I have waded through and sorted my letters, and procured and despatched the orders for the gallery, the Private Business down for the day's sitting has been transacted, and Questions have begun. I have already glanced through these as printed in the "Orders of the Day," and see that out of some seventy only about half a dozen relate to matters of public importance. The answers to these will appear in to-morrow's papers and I shall lose nothing by waiting so long to learn them. To remain in the House for something like an hour and a half while grave answers are given to questions on trivial subjects is at best

but to gratify a spirit of idle curiosity, and I feel that I can employ the time to better advantage by grappling with my correspondence. I sit down therefore at a vacant corner of one of the writing-tables in the division lobby, and have pretty well mastered the more pressing part of it, when a prolonged burst of cheering in the House induces me to ask a passing friend, "What's up now?" "The O'Dashit has moved the adjournment of the House on some Irish question," says he, "and has been supported by the whole strength of the Opposition. I suppose," he adds, "it will be a case of 3 o'clock in the morning, for the Standing Orders are suspended and the Government must get some votes to-night." I step into the House in order to judge of the prospect for myself. The spectacle there presented is a singular one. The apartment is virtually empty. The members who, so vociferously cheered the uprising of the orator do not await his down-sitting. He has announced his intention to lay the deplorable condition to which the people of Ireland have been reduced by the policy of the Chief Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant before the House as briefly as is compatible with the doing of full justice to the subject, and experience has taught me that Irish brevity on these occasions bears a

strong resemblance to English prolixity. In short, it is soon apparent that the whole business is a mere hollow demonstration got up for the sole purpose of killing time. I listen to the orator for a few moments, as in impassioned accents he expands his theme, but as I have heard him and his associates express the same sentiments and use the same arguments, or what pass for arguments, on the same subject on many previous occasions, I prefer to study in the library rather than loiter in the House. Besides, to-morrow will be a private members' night, and many measures of importance are down for second reading on which I desire enlightenment, and this unexpected interval will afford me the opportunity I need. So to the library I go and am soon deep in the mysteries of the Early Rising Bill, the Bill for increasing the Average Magnitude of Small Potatoes (a measure designed to relieve the prevailing depression in agriculture), the Bill for Keeping Sunday in the Middle of the Week, the Domestic Explosives Bill (a measure for regulating the propulsive force of ginger beer), and other projects of legislation of a similar character in whose composition so many private members are usefully engaged. I am still hard at work when a messenger brings me a card on which

an influential constituent states that he desires to see me on "urgent business." It will not do to keep this gentleman waiting, so I at once make my way to the **central hall**, and find that my friend's "urgent business" is to obtain an admission order to the gallery. I point to the printed placards hanging on the wall which announce that all the galleries are full; but it is not the first time this gentleman has come on a similar errand, and he is not to be put off. Will I do my best for him? The Speaker's Office is closed, but the Sergeant-at-Arms may have some supplemental orders to dispose of, so of him I make inquiry. An ingenious piece of mechanism has lately been placed beneath the desk in front of his seat in the House which is in electrical communication with the gallery, and on this the vacancies in the various divisions of the gallery are indicated as they occur by the attendant there. Consulting this he finds that there are seats unoccupied in the Speaker's gallery, for which accordingly he gives me an order, and armed therewith my visitor obtains his wish.

There are now signs of an approaching Division, and presently I find myself an item in the crowd which fills the "No" lobby. As only two members in each lobby can pass the clerks who record the

votes at a time it is useless to hurry, and in divisions where a large number vote members take it leisurely in the lobbies, and sometimes linger so long that towards the close the Whips have to remind them of the flight of time by the shout of "Door, door!" Here, too, the great men relax and speak affably to the little men. In the division lobby one man's vote is as good as another's, and this perhaps may encourage that sense of equality which we feel there. Moreover, of late the utter futility of many of the divisions forced on the House for purely frivolous or obstructive reasons makes the gravest of us conscious of the ridiculous position in which the action of a few reckless or foolish men puts us, and being all, whether eminent or lowly, in a like case, we have a fellow-feeling of sympathy for each other which tends to equalize us. For instance, in a division of this kind, I happen to find myself hedged in, say, between a Privy Councillor (*honoris causa*, only this and nothing more) on the one side and a Cabinet Minister on the other. In the ordinary way I should be embarrassed in such distinguished company, but a common fate induces community of sentiment and places us on the same low level of suffering humanity. I throw a shade of disgust over my countenance in order to show

that I, too, humble mortal though I be, feel equally with them the degrading nature of the performance we are compelled to go through, and my companions are good enough to recognize in me a fellow-victim of the demon of obstruction. "Weary work, this, Mr. Blank," says the Privy Councillor, a thought patronizingly perhaps, but that may be manner. The Minister is all affability. "We shall deserve our holiday when it comes, Mr. Blank, eh? Do you go abroad this year, or down to your place in the country?" I am somewhat taken aback by so much condescension, but pull myself together and contrive, with more or less of coherency, to reply that I shall probably go down to my "little place," and the incident closes. These courtesies, these unbendings of great minds, are wonderfully useful, however, in cementing party ties. I talk quite big in the country afterwards of my interview with the Secretary of State, or the First Lord, as the case may be, and feel all the better for it, and more fixed in my political convictions. The division over, the Speaker is moved out of the Chair. Mr. Courtney, the Chairman of Committees, takes the seat of the Clerk of the House at the table, and we resolve ourselves into a Committee of Supply. It is evident at the outset that it is to be a night of

obstruction ; that if the Government are to get any votes it will either be by the application of the closure, or by patient endurance, which, towards the small hours, may meet with its reward. The *mot d'ordre* to us Conservatives is the usual one, "Mum." Do not give the obstructives a chance to allege that by opening our mouths we conduce in the smallest degree to the mere consumption of time on which they themselves are bent. Let them talk themselves out, if that be possible, and perhaps the votes may pass without the application of the closure after all. This is not a bold policy, but it is sometimes effectual. Meanwhile time slips by, and dinner suggests itself. I am in the midst of the juiciest part of an excellent rump-steak when the division bells ring. We guess it to be only a "Count," but we must go to make a House all the same. We arrive breathless to find, as we suspected, that a Parnellite member has moved that the House be counted, partly with the object of securing an audience for a friend who finds talking to empty benches dull work, and partly out of a mischievous desire to annoy political opponents by disturbing them at an inconvenient season. Smiles of satisfaction illumine the countenances of this amiable soul and his associates at the success of their

manœuvre. **They** regard it as quite a triumph of **Statecraft**. The Chairman promptly announces a quorum, "forty," and back we go to hurry and grumble over a meal now tepid and tasteless.

I have now arrived at a period of the night's labours when I must allow my pen to linger over the most agreeable, and I might add most influential of institutions, the smoking-room of the House of Commons, whither I now repair in order to enjoy an after-dinner whiff. In point of fact there are two smoking-rooms, one on the basement, which opens on to the Terrace, and one next the dining-rooms, on a level with the House and its surroundings. It is of the latter alone that I shall speak. The lower smoking-room is a bleak, comfortless chamber, well enough in summer as a shelter from a shower, should one happen to be on the Terrace, and as strangers are admitted there and not to the upper smoking-room, it is the only place in the building to which one can take a friend, should the weather or the season debar one from the Terrace. But there its merits, such as they are, end. The true smoking-room is the upper one, sacred to members only. The apartment itself is not remarkable. It is, I should suppose, some thirty feet or so square, and lofty in proportion. On the walls

are three enormous cartoons, the subjects whereof are matters on which the curious delight to speculate. I incline myself to assign them to some date **anterior to history, regarding them as the *chef d'œuvres*** of some gifted artist who flourished in the Wooden Age, and intended possibly to illustrate the evolution of our race from less advanced progenitors. At any rate the limbs of the strange beings who figure on these canvases are not put on in the same way as ours are now, nor do their bodies present the same anatomical features as our own. The smoke of countless pipes and cigars is gradually lending to these productions a dim and distant effect, for which, as good Pepys would say, "the Lord be thanked."

The general appearance of the apartment is that of a second-class waiting room at a railway station, so there is none of the cosiness of the domestic snuggerly about it. Still, a creditable attempt is made to meet the wants of the after-dinner loungeur. In order to accentuate a sense of ease, there should ever be gradations of comfort, descending from luxurious repose to mere stiff-backed unrest; and here we have variety enough, from the arm-chair in the chimney corner, which by a long course of incubation is accommodated to the exuberances of

the human frame, the abiding place of the oldest, the wittiest, or the worthiest, down through a sliding-scale to the clerkly cane-bottom, fit repository for the humbler or hardier limbs of the young or the unconsidered. One feature of the room should not pass unnoticed. This is a rhomboidal space, fenced off in one corner and flanked on the outer side by cases of cigars. One is disappointed at first not to see a wooden Highlander on guard outside, and, within, a young lady with towzled hair, it looks so like a section of a tobacco shop. Inspection reveals the fact that, though there is no young lady in the space in question, it is, nevertheless, tenanted. For a while a mystery clung round the spot which puzzled me. From a kind of recess or cupboard noises, perpetually recurring, proceeded, in part resembling the clashing of crockery; whereupon, after an interval, a being in the garb of a waiter, but with the mien and air of a conjuror or medium, would produce, apparently from nowhere, a cup of coffee, tasting appropriately enough of nothing. In time I discovered that this magic cave answered the purpose of a refreshment bar, whence, by some occult process, the drinks that smokers mostly affect could be supplied to them. On one occasion I rashly asked for bread and butter

with my coffee. The presiding genius mentioned above muttered words sounding so weird and incantation-like that I fully looked for a spirit hand to waft me from mid-air the object of my desire. It seems, however, that I had demanded something which it was beyond even his art to procure. He vanished, and after long absence reappeared, and, with a contemptuous gesture, as of one who would signify that a request for food in a smoking-room where good liquor abounded was foolishness, proffered me a currant bun of antique mould, stale and unpalatable, a remanet from past Parliaments, which, had it been a thing of life, would have babbled of Peel and Palmerston, and demanded therefor a fabulous price as for a curiosity in breadstuffs. As I slowly and with difficulty disposed of this arid morsel, visions of the past floated before my mind's eye. In fancy I beheld the confectioner's shop in the little country town to which, on holidays, a respected aunt would hale me, a confiding youngster, and treat me, not to the tarts, the puffs, and the jellies for which the natural boy hankered, but to what, in the estimation of the worthy soul, was good for me. I heard again the voice of the young person in ringlets putting the invariable query: "And what will the young gentleman please to

take, Ma'am?" And how invariable the reply! "Well," my relative would say, and as she spoke she would, woman-like, raise delusive hopes by an affectation of hesitancy, and would even allow her glance to linger, as though appreciatively, on the sticks of barley sugar in the tall glass bottles—I could have done with one of them; "well"—I knew my doom now—"I think—yes, John," in a tone that admitted of no question, "you will take a bun, will you not?" I would signify a gloomy assent: it was better than nothing. "And if you have a stale one, Miss Perkins, I think my nephew would prefer that." I felt again, as I crumbled the unrelishing mouthful, the sensations of youth. There was the same process, the dry process, of deglutition. In boyhood's hour a glass of water lent, by gulps, a grateful assistance, and on high, festive, and too rare occasions, a bottle of ginger beer—not the bright effervescing beverage containing ever so many degrees of pure alcohol, beloved of the modern teetotaller, but a flat, spiritless drink, with scarcely "go" enough to shoot its own cork, and which, after a feeble fizz or two, sank despondingly to the bottom of the very large glass into which the young person used to empty the very small bottle. As these reminiscences of the age of innocence were

borne in on me I was touched, and had the manly tear presented itself I should, without shame, have brushed it away.

But to proceed. I have described our room and the skeleton in our cupboard at such length that I have almost forgotten the smokers themselves. I start then with the simple proposition that all smokers are good men, good in every sense of the word. Were the smoking-room the legislative chamber, what laws we should pass, what reforms we should effect, and how the people would rejoice and sing! I take it indeed that the presence in Parliament of members to whom the weed is not acceptable is at the bottom of much foolish law making, and I have it in mind to establish this view on a scientific basis, but for the moment must be content to advance the theory in general terms. I judge men not by their words. Perish "Hansard," but preserve our pipes. Let who will read the speeches of our representatives provided I know what pipes they smoke. I say pipes advisedly, for although my fundamental proposition assumes the virtue of all inhalers of tobacco, it does not exclude degrees of goodness; worthiest the smokers of the short pipe, least worthy the smokers of cigarettes. Why this distinction? Compare the two processes;

which should commend itself most to a practical people ; look and decide. Here the labourer takes the familiar companion of his toil, tries, loads, and lights it, smokes, methodically knocks out the ashes, replaces it in its accustomed receptacle, and resumes his work, if even he have intermitted it. 'Tis the relaxation of industry. There, the loungee, with the dexterity begotten of use, envelopes a tasteless pinch in a filmy covering, lights, consumes, and in a brief space is plying his art again. 'Tis the occupation of indolence. It is a cheery sign to notice how largely the smoking of short pipes prevails in the smoking-room of the House of Commons. The cigar and cigarette smokers seem to feel their isolation and the awkwardness of their position. They would prefer a pipe, they will tell you with an apologetic air, if only they could smoke one. The will is good, they imply, but the stomach weak. Speaking for myself, I should be sorry not to have amongst us a few who, in the slang of the day, are not able to live up to a short pipe. Their presence enables the stronger brethren to practice a charitable spirit of forbearance which I believe to conduce in no small degree to the promotion and maintenance of the harmony and concord which reign so conspicuously in the

smoking-room, and render that apartment so agreeable and so complete a change from the highly-charged atmosphere of the House itself; for one of the chief attractions of the smoking-room is that there we sink political differences. There the Radical welcomes the Tory; the Unionist endures the Separatist; and the Nationalist lies down with the Metropolitan member. It is astonishing too how much cleverer and better informed we are in the smoking-room than in the House. If I remembered one half that I heard there I ought to be able to reconstruct the British navy on lines so economical and yet so efficient that it would be "a match, Sir, for the combined fleets of Europe"; to remit taxes without reducing revenue; to pay Peter without robbing Paul; in a word, to settle the affairs of the nation on the soundest basis at the shortest notice. But although opinions are freely expressed and without any tinge of party rancour on a vast variety of subjects, men with mere fads—the peculiar people of the House—seldom turn up in the smoking-room, or, if they do, keep their views on their respective fads to themselves. Sour professors of extreme opinions, profoundly impressed with the folly of all men, themselves only excepted, and deeply convinced of

the worthlessness of all institutions which they themselves have not helped to form; men who fancy that the best way to persuade the House of Commons is to rate that assembly at inordinate length and in good set terms are not, perhaps, welcomed in the smoking-room with the cordiality extended to less gifted beings. It could hardly be expected of us that we should, metaphorically speaking, open our arms and clasp to our bosoms the pedagogues who treat us as if we were a set of truant schoolboys, hardly worth whipping, but whom a sense of duty compels them to castigate.

Of late I am bound to admit that a change, not altogether satisfactory, has been wrought in the social aspect of the smoking-room by the introduction of the game of chess. Instead of the small coteries of friends who used to while away the half hour after dinner, or the interval from business when the Speaker left the Chair, with anecdote and repartee, you have some half dozen or so of chess-players, each pair surrounded by a circle of on-lookers, silent but critical. Two years ago, before chess was thought of, we had the temporary use, as an addition to the smoking-room, of a small committee-room of the House of Lords which opened out of the latter apartment. The convenience

of the arrangement, which was appreciated then, would be enhanced if we could obtain the room again, since it would enable us to give to the chess-players the accommodation they need, and at the same time to restore some of the social geniality of the smoking-room proper which the absorbing attractions of the game have in a measure checked. To-night my stay in the smoking-room must be short, for, in company with two or three other members, I have to meet a deputation from the ginger-beer trade, who consider that their business will be injuriously affected by the provisions of the measure to which I have already incidentally referred—the Domestic Explosives Bill. Our interview takes place in the conference-room—a cheerful apartment combining the heat of an oven with the gloom of a railway tunnel—and lasts for the best part of an hour.

On my way back to the House a friend accosts me and asks me to do him a favour. It seems that he had arranged to meet an acquaintance from the country at ten o'clock and show him and his wife and some lady friends round the building, but that another engagement of a more pressing character has since intervened. He therefore begs me to act as escort in his stead, adding that, presuming on

my known amiability of disposition, he has already written to the gentleman to say that I will undertake the pleasing duty—a duty which, it is my private opinion, my friend is anxious to shirk. However, the heat and foul air of the conference-room have so damped my spirits that I have not enough energy left to refuse him, and presently find myself in the Central Hall, where, on hearing my name called out, a portly gentleman introduces himself, and then in succession his wife, also portly, and no less than six young ladies, of whom five are presumably their daughters. The sixth is announced, with a bit of a flourish, as a fair American, daughter of that renowned politician Romulus P. Bang. I do not quite catch the name, but that is what it sounds like. As I am not sure, and as Bang, though it may be an acceptable cognomen in the States, somewhat grates on English ears, especially in connexion with an undeniably pretty girl, I will call her “Miss B.” The gentleman meanly washes his hands, so to speak, of his whole following the moment I have them well in tow. He affects to have a soul above mere curiosity. He loftily implies that perhaps some day, don’t you know, he may have the same right of entry that I have. Besides, he has a large acquaintance with

members of Parliament, and can always get in if he wants to, and so on.

My suspicions are justified. My friend knew his man. However, there is no help for it now, so on we go, quite a girl's school, for whose good behaviour I feel myself to be in part responsible. At the entrance to the Inner Lobby of the House I make a wild rush with the lot, so as to get the business over quickly, but am promptly stopped by the porters. "You can only take *two* in at a time, Sir," says the senior, with a slight emphasis on the numeral, just to let me know that he appreciates the situation so far as I am concerned. I take them in, therefore, two and two—more like a girls' school than ever! As the House is sitting we cannot enter the actual chamber, but if the ladies will by turns mount a seat placed in a sort of niche by the side of the door, they will obtain a fair view of the interior through a glass panel about a foot square. I know of old what each one will say. "Oh, how small it is! And is this really the House Commons? Is that Mr. Gladstone?" "No," I interpose; "Mr. Gladstone is not here to-night; that is Mr. W. H. Smith, the Leader of the House." "Oh, indeed! Where does Mr. Gladstone sit? Thank you so much." Candour compels me to

admit, much as I distrust this statesman, that Mr. Gladstone is the only member of Parliament invariably inquired after by every lady who peeps through the glass panel I have described. I have endeavoured to excite interest in other politicians, with small success. "That tall man," I have said, "is Mr. Raikes, the Postmaster-General"—no display of emotion. "That elderly gentleman with white hair and beard," I have continued, "is Mr. Childers"—no sign. "And that youngish man in the corner seat, feeling for his moustache," I have sometimes added, "is Lord Randolph Churchill"—slight shiver. But when I have been able to say, "There, that is Mr. Gladstone, that old gentleman looking this way, with his hand to his ear, listening so attentively to the member addressing the House, who is Mr. Timothy Healy, of whom you may have heard," the beautiful being I inform at once brightens up, and exclaims, "Is it really! How nice! Thank you so much." Miss B. says nothing, but her countenance is expressive, and I can tell what she thinks. "If this is the Britisher's Congress, no wonder the Britisher is played out." From the House we proceed in the direction of the Library, into which we may be permitted to glance, although by a recent regulation

strangers are forbidden to pass through it during the sitting of the House. As we pass along the corridor it strikes me as never looking so narrow and mean as it does now. I cannot help fancying that Miss B. is curling her lip, so to excuse its paltry appearance I say, "These lockers on each side were added comparatively lately. They fill up the space very much, but we find them useful. Most of us have one." Here a girl, who has hitherto preserved an awed silence, is roused to interest. "Why, we had lockers at school—don't you remember, Maria? And have you a locker, Mr. Blank?" "Yes," I reply. "And what do you put in it?" "Oh," I say, with dignity, "Blue Books, statutes, and other documents of importance." "How nice. I should so like to see one." "Well," I reply, assuming the air of cheerful amusement with which a middle-aged—no, a man in the prime of life—condescends to the fancies of youth, "so you shall. We pass mine directly." When we come to it I unlock and throw open the door. I hear a titter from one of the giglets, a minx who ought to be in bed at this time of night if her parents had any regard for her health, and looking in behold, Oh, horrors! a box of cigars and a bottle of my tonic precisely the colour of pale

brandy; only placed there yesterday, too! The mother comes to my rescue. It is desirable to close both the incident and the locker. She has to think of the morals of her young people. As for herself she reads me, she thinks, like a book. She knows men and their failings. They are all alike, but have to be put up with unfortunately. "Thank you, Mr. Blank. *That* is the Library opposite, is it not? Come, girls, we are taking up Mr. Blank's *valuable* time." Much crestfallen I lead them the usual round back to the Commons lobby and out by the members' entrance. At the foot of the last flight of stairs, and in a cupboard-like room on the right, Miss B.'s attention is arrested. "Why, isn't that a telephone?" she asks. "Yes," I reply, pleased that at length I have something to point out to the hitherto little interested stranger which will show her how proudly the old country still marches in the van of scientific discovery and progress, and so on. "Oh, yes; we are in telephonic communication with the Central Exchange, and most useful we find it, I assure you. You know how it works, I suppose," I say, turning to the English girls and their mother. "No, indeed." "Never saw one before." "Should so like to." "Oh, delightful; so should I," break forth naïvely,

in a sort of chorus from the girls who, English-like, it is our one good failing, are not a bit ashamed of betraying their ignorance even in the presence of this evidently superior young American. It opportunely occurs to me that Mrs. Blank and I propose to stay at Brighton from Saturday to Monday, and that I was to have wired for rooms; but have forgotten to do so. Happy thought—telephone instead. So I say: "Well, I wanted to send a message. I may as well do so now, then you will see what a wonderful invention this is." I look round for the attendant, but fail to find him. A friendly assistant in the cloak-room opposite perceives my perplexity. "I saw the young man, Sir, half an hour ago. I fancy he is only just gone round the corner." I glance uneasily at Miss B. There is the "played-out Britisher" expression on her countenance again. "We do business in a different style from this in the States," she seems to say. It is very annoying, the more so as my knowledge of the instrument is theoretical rather than practical, and as a matter of fact I do not know how to put myself in communication with the Central Exchange. The cloak-room assistant still wonders where the young man can be. "Saw him here," he repeats with quite the freshness of a new

idea, "half an hour ago." Presently he adds, as if a singular notion had just struck him, "But if you want to send a message I can put you in communication. You touch this here, so. There, now there's a bell a-ringing in the office. Then they'll ring a bell here, and you takes their bell off, and then they knows as you are a-waitin'." "Thank you," I say; "I quite understand—much obliged," as if to imply complete familiarity with the process. My bell rings violently. I apply a tube to each ear.

Now, how shall I begin? "Are you ready?" No; smacks of the race-course. "Are you there?" No; that won't do. "Who are you?" Worse. The bell tinkles again. I plunge into the subject. "Put me in communication with Simpkinson's Hotel, Brighton." "What? Please repeat." I do repeat. "Wait a few minutes." I wait, tubes at ear—a ridiculous attitude to be kept in, especially before a lot of girls. A friend passing by, attracted by the spectacle, looks in at the door. He is one of those well-informed and well-intentioned persons who ever hanker to set others right. "Ah, Blank!" says he, "that's not the way. You should speak through one and listen through the other. I always do." I am sure he is wrong, but cannot argue the

point, as just then the bell rings again, and a voice, evidently a female's, says impatiently: "Now, then, we are waiting for you. What do you want?" "Will you put me in communication, please, with Simpkinson's Hotel, Brighton?" "Yes, directly; but—" (here something quite undistinguishable). "What?" I say. (Another incoherent answer.) "I cannot understand a word you say." "Oh, come; that's funny; I can hear you quite plainly." This in a cheerful tone of light badinage which suggests that the speaker is used to banter. Can it be that the younger members of the House spend their spare time in the flavourless pursuit of flirting by telephone? I repeat my original message in a tone of business-like rebuke and receive the accustomed reply: "Wait a few minutes." I wait again tubes at ear. Plenty of communications reach me now. What can be going on at the office? They must be having a game of romps with the gentlemen clerks. That was a kiss, a good sounding smack, if ever I gave one, and the squeal, too, just like life. Now, all the fat must be in the fire somewhere, to judge from the frizzling; and what is this I hear? Surely a Volunteer band or the Salvation Army! No; it is a school-treat. How the children are hallooing!

Whilst all this Babel of sounds is piercing my brain, my audience are becoming a trifle bored. "I am afraid, Mr. Blank," says the matron, "we are putting you to great inconvenience. Probably they are engaged at the office." Just then the bell rings again, and I hear a voice: "Now, then, we are waiting for you. What do you want?" "I want," I say resolutely, "to be put in communication with Simpkinson's Hotel, Brighton." "What name?" "Simpkinson." "Spell it, if you please." "S, i, m, Sim, p, i, n, pin—no, I mean S, i, m, p, Simp, k, i, n, kin, s, o, n, son, Simpkinson." The girls behind are in full titter now, and even Miss B. relaxes. Back comes the answer, plainly enough at last: "Communication with Simpkinson's has been cut off for a month."

I put as good a face on the failure as I can. "Wonderful invention, though, isn't it?" I say to Miss B. "You are familiar with the telephone in your country, I suppose?" "Yes," she replies, simply; "we have one at home in the back parlour. We generally speak Europe two or three times a day." I call cabs for them. Where to? Metropole. So much obliged to you. They will not forget their visit to Westminster; nor shall I.

The hours roll by, the debate still drags on, and

as yet no vote and no sign of one. About one o'clock in the morning it strikes some of us that we are spending valuable time to no purpose, and that something ought to be done. The bolder and less broken spirits address a remonstrance to the Whips, and want to know what course the Government intend to pursue. It is part of the functions of Ministerial Whips on occasion to be frankly ignorant. They are so now. They cannot say what will happen. They take, however, a cheerful view of the situation, but specially counsel prudence. Let no irritated mortal be rash enough to intervene in the debate. Our cue, they tell us, is to endure in silence lest worse evils befall us. Perchance, if we are very good and very quiet, and say nothing to annoy the obstructives, they may, presently, in their gracious pleasure, or from sheer weariness, cease from troubling. And so we are kept from hour to hour in a sort of *rusticus expectans* attitude, waiting for the clouds of verbiage to roll by and the flood of twaddle to run dry. Meanwhile we sleep. Each easy chair has long since found an occupant. It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that one can hardly thread one's way through the division lobbies for the prostrate forms of slumbering senators littered along them. I met a junior member of the

Administration about two o'clock one morning carrying a couple of heavy quarto volumes of Statutes of the Realm. "What, busy as ever?" I said to him, pleasantly. "No," he replied, wearily and shortly, "Pillow." Unenlightened, but yet interested, I watched him. He raised one end of a cushioned seat, placed the books beneath, made himself a pillow, and straightway reposed thereon. Two hours later I passed him by. He was still sleeping sweetly on the 4th and 5th of Geo. III.

To-night we are evidently in for a long sitting of the good old-fashioned sort. The small hours become bigger hours. The grey dawn shows ghastly at the windows of the House. "Night's candles are burnt out, and jocund day stands tiptoe on the misty chimney tops." Presently there is a stir. Sleepers, awake! the time of your deliverance is at hand. The Whips range through the lobbies with a jubilant "I-told-you-so," air. Dishevelled mortals eagerly interview them. "Oh, yes, it's all right now. They are going to let us have a vote." So we get the vote at last after hours of profitless talk, and not merely one vote, but other votes besides, without any discussion on them whatever, although on some of them questions of real interest and importance might be raised. We have virtually

debated nothing all this while, and then when something worthy of consideration comes before us, from weariness we pass it unnoticed. However, we have got the votes at last, and are so thankful for any mercies now that we feel quite triumphant. "Something like business this, eh!" we say to each other as we walk home in the broad daylight.

NOTE.—A third smoking-room, a little slip of a place opening on to the Terrace, for members only, has been provided since the above was written, but as yet its merits remain undiscovered, and it clearly makes no pretension to vie with the smoking-room proper above stairs.

THE ORATORY OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS.

THE occasion of my first speech was the anniversary or Feast of the Village Friendly Society, the subject of it the health of an absent relative for which I, a mere stripling, was called on to respond. That this task would fall to my lot had loomed largely before me for days, and for days had embittered my existence. A commendable regulation of the Club required that its members on the Feast day and prior to the banquet should attend Divine Service, walking to the parish church in procession equipped with long green staves each surmounted by a ball and spike. It had at such times been the custom of us youngsters to relieve the tedium of the parade by some dexterous handling of our staves, and I had known the day when to prod a fat farmer (farmers were fatter then than they are now) in the small of the back when that region could be discovered, with the spike end was

regarded as an apt jest, which even the recipient of the attention accepted in the friendly spirit in which it was offered. But on this memorable occasion, although a tempting subject marched in front of me, my staff rested unemployed in my listless hand. During the service I was distraught, for I was giving the last polish to my periods; and when we settled down for the sermon I in thought rehearsed my speech for the twentieth time. At length the dread moment arrived. My relative's virtues were recounted, his cordial appreciation of the benevolent fraud (for we were a bankrupt body although we did not know it), was dwelt on in becoming terms, and his absence feelingly deplored. My name was coupled with the toast, and I rose to respond. Much to my surprise I retained my consciousness, and although I forgot my exordium, and omitted my peroration, I must have acquitted myself tolerably well, for the proposer of some subsequent toast was obliging enough to mention my speech in the language of compliment, and to augur from it that I should one day become the Speaker of the House of Commons. I knew that the view of the functions of our Presiding Genius implied in the reference of my friendly critic was founded on a misconception of them, but his drift

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was clear. Simple rustic though he was, he, in common with the bulk of his countrymen, educated or illiterate, looked to one place and one place alone for his standard of oratorical excellence. Reputation oftentimes survives when the virtue on which it was raised is lost. We still think of the House of Commons as the place in which the greatest of our orators are seen and heard at their best. It is indeed the fittest arena for them to contend in, for there they are directly pitted against each other; but except on rare occasions it is no longer the place in which they rise to the highest flights, and deliver themselves of their noblest conceptions. These they reserve for the platform—and for good reasons. Owing to the increase in the number of speakers in the House and in the business of the House, the opportunities for the making of set speeches there are fewer than they used to be, while the conductors of newspapers fall in with the popular indisposition to wade through columns of debates, and all but one shorten their reports to the merest summary of undressed arguments. But should a statesman of the first rank deliver a platform address, he is pretty sure of a full report in the newspapers of the following day. Politicians can thus answer each other from

opposing platforms almost as quickly as they could in the House, and with more effect and more freedom. In a set debate lasting over two or three nights, the great guns seldom, except just at the finish, reply to each other in the same sitting. If Mr. Gladstone, for example, speak in the debate on a Monday, he will be answered by Lord Hartington on the Tuesday. The same thing happens in platform oratory. The fixtures for the public addresses of prominent statesmen are arranged many weeks beforehand, and where, as is the case just now, there is a good supply of chief speakers on both sides of both Houses, it is always possible by chance or design for one party man to answer another either the next day or within a period sufficiently short to render the reply effective.

Political leaders have in all times largely availed themselves of the platform for the purpose of announcing or denouncing a policy, and on certain recurring occasions, as the Lord Mayor's Banquet, a ministerial statement has come to be looked for almost as a matter of right, but it is new, I think, for public men to depend so much as they do now on platform speeches for the purpose of controversy. The result at any rate is to change the conditions under which opposing leaders contend. Instead of

fighting in an arena crowded with adherents of both combatants, each cock-crows on his own dunghill to an applauding audience of staunch supporters. The effect of this change on the oratory of the House of Commons is, I will not say ruinous, but damaging beyond question. The best men reserve their best efforts and their happiest thoughts for the platform, and are satisfied if in the House they can maintain a level of efficiency high enough to sustain their reputation there. The style of speaking, too, that suits the platform is for the most part unsuited to the House. New members feel this at once, and it may take a man who on the platform is a past master in the art of tickling the ears of the groundlings, some sessions to acquire the plain argumentative style most acceptable to our legislators. Yet platform orators gravitate as though by the operation of some natural law to the House of Commons, partly because, seeing the increased use made of the platform by their political leaders, they are tempted to exaggerate the value of their own reputation and are ambitious to test their capacity in a higher sphere, and partly because experience has long since taught them that a speaker who has a right to append the letters M.P. to his name stands a better chance of being well reported than

a speaker, however eloquent, who has no such right. Once in the House, the man who has made his mark outside speaks at first at some disadvantage. Lord Holland, in his *Memoirs of the Whig Party*, says *apropos* to the favourable impression that Grattan created on his first appearance in the Parliament of the United Kingdom, that this was the more to his credit because the House of Commons "has at all times been remarkable for great reluctance in confirming reputations for oratory elsewhere obtained," a disposition which continues to this day. It is a common saying that no matter how violent, how extreme, or how objectionable in any obtrusive way a man may be who aspires to enter Parliament, no sooner does he come within its walls than he "finds his level." The meaning ordinarily attached to this phrase is, that the House of Commons is an assembly which has some special power of putting down by its inherent virtue, so to speak, pushing, boisterous persons who, by making noise enough, have acquired an outside notoriety. The House possesses, it seems to be thought, some magic spell whereby it is enabled to tame the wildest beast. The result I admit. The beast is tamed, but by no occult process. Most ordinary are the causes that

reduce the great platform orator—the applauded of thousands—into an insignificant and often ineffective speaker in the House. I take mere material and physical causes **first**. The platform speaker, especially if he be of some **consequence**, looks to have his convenience and comfort considered. He is fetched and carried. He dines wisely, but not too well, at the board of some genial host, with a pleasant company specially invited to do him honour. In the Hall he is placed in a position whence he can command his audience. He has a table at hand on which to arrange his notes, and on the first symptom of huskiness or hesitation the chairman pours him out a glass of water which he sips amid the sympathetic murmurs of his hearers. How differently situated does he find himself in the House! His meals there are much mixed, and possibly the latest that may have passed his lips may have consisted of a cup of tea and a round of toast. From the seat whence he rises he cannot even see a great part of those whom he addresses, and he speaks with his back to many of them. Instead of the unrestricted freedom of the platform, he finds himself, unless the occupant of a front bench, cramped between the seat of his own bench and the back of the bench before him.

The only receptacle provided for his memoranda is a sort of wooden gutter some eighteen inches long by three wide, affixed to the back of the bench in front of him. This being a perfectly vain thing of itself, some *habitué* teaches him how to utilize it by suspending his hat on it by the brim. This feat accomplished—and it is a pretty little example of applied mechanics—he puts his notes in his hat, only to find, when he would consult them, that by some impassioned gesture he has dashed hat and notes in admired confusion to the ground. These are some of the awkward physical features of the situation. There are others of a less material character but not less embarrassing. He has to catch the Speaker's eye as it circles in its orbit. This to a grave and dignified orator accustomed to be introduced in rotund phrases by a noble chairman, to rise leisurely from his seat and placidly survey his audience until the cheers that greet him subside, is no simple task. Half a dozen members are on their legs, all but one down again, and he named and well on in his speech, before the platform orator has realized the position. Ultimately he finds that, except in an empty House, his only chance is to lean well forward, clutch the back of the seat in front of him with both hands, keep his knees bent

and his heels raised, and as the last word dies on the lips of the member he would follow, spring by the combined action of all his muscles into a vertical attitude with the velocity of a Jack-in-the-box, and exclaim in stentorian tones, "Mr. Speaker, Sir." His troubles do not end here. No cheer invigorates him. He is stared at in stony silence, broken only by the whispers of "Who is he?" and the rustle of the leaves of the little book which every one takes out of his pocket and consults in order to find the new member's constituency. I am in my way a thought reader. "O, this is the great platform orator; come, let us snub him," is the mental ejaculation of each member. The platform orator misses his accustomed exordium, "My lord, ladies and gentlemen. When I find myself in the presence of so large, so influential, and so representative an assembly of citizens of this great centre of industry and intelligence, I feel," &c., &c. He has prepared quite an effective address, with all his points arranged in due sequence, but the debate has taken a different turn from that which he expected; many of his points have been anticipated, and his most telling quotations appropriated by previous speakers. Driven to his wits' end he has reduced his voluminous notes to a few pencil

scratches on the blank leaf of the "Orders of the Day." He finds his fluency forsaking him, and when by a natural mischance he says "Gentlemen" instead of "Sir," the cries of "Order" confuse him. He grows husky, but there is not a glass of water in the House—even the greatest of living orators has to bring his tonic with him and sip it out of a two ounce phial. Presently he warms to his work, and out come some well worn platform platitudes that have never failed to rouse the ringing British cheer. How flat they fall! Was ever such an unsympathetic audience! Our orator is, as he terms it, always good for forty minutes, but he has sense enough to perceive that a far shorter time will satisfy the House of his quality, and at the end of a quarter of an hour he resumes his seat, uncomfortably conscious that he has "found his level." It by no means follows, however, that this very same man will in the long run fail to gain the ear of the House, though he may have difficulties to contend against that a less well known man would not meet with. He is probably past his first youth; if not, he has many a chance yet, for the House but reflects human nature in its tenderness to the young. He has to overcome, as I have said, an instinctive dislike of outside reputation; he has to learn a new style

of speaking, and he has to make head against a variety of prejudices of great antiquity and highly cherished. If he be no longer young he is pronounced too old to ~~accommodate~~ himself to the **House of Commons**. If he belong to the legal profession he is damned offhand. Lawyers, except as law officers, never, it is said, succeed in the House. Besides, "we have too many of them already, sir. We could spare one half and do without the rest." Still, in the end success as a speaker depends very much on the man himself, for, when all is said and done, the House quickly recognizes capacity and appreciates it.

But if the oratory of the House of Commons be deteriorating, as some think, perhaps the members are not so much to blame as their constituents and the general public, who demand without ceasing such a succession of speeches from them. Say you aspire to public life. Unless you are a very rich man, and can, so to speak, buy your position by your profusion, you must first make your mark. In order to effect this object you must show that you can express your ideas on the questions of the day more effectively than your contemporaries. Nothing but thought and study can enable you to do this. In the early stage of your career, therefore,

however able you may fancy yourself to be, you take pains with your speeches. You are not probably called on then to make many, so that you have time to devote to their preparation. Some of the best speeches I have listened to have been made by **local men to whom the taking of some part in the organization of the political party to which they belong has given them the sought-for opportunity of distinguishing themselves.** It is quite likely that at this stage you may be incapable of making an impromptu speech—so much the better as a rule for the quality of your speeches—but as you progress you find readiness to be an essential. In time you become a candidate for the suffrages of some constituency and ultimately fight and win the seat. In the course of the struggle you abandon the attempt to prepare your speeches. You have to speak so often and so unexpectedly that neither time for study nor opportunity is afforded you. You gain something, it is true—Fluency. If I were a novelist intending to base a work of fiction on the luckless career of a disappointed politician, I should choose for the name of my book one of those double or alternative titles dear to our forefathers. I should call my novel “Frank’s Failure, or Fatal Fluency.” Fluency, if I may misapply my

metaphors, is the rock on which many a promising politician founders. In the case I am assuming you know quite well that in proportion as speaking becomes easier and easier to you so do your speeches go off in quality. When a man feels sufficiently sure of himself to be satisfied that he need never come to a dead stop on a platform, he must be very strong-minded, or possessed with a burning desire to display himself to the best advantage, if he take much trouble in preparation, for there is no task that human nature so revolts against as the composition of a studied speech. "To make a speech in a public Assembly," says Johnson, in his sweeping way, "is a knack," as if to imply that the performance is in the nature of a trick which a speaker can be put up to and by practice can master, and for which one man may display more aptitude than another, just as one man, though no better taught than another, may turn out the cleverer conjuror of the two. There is something to be said for this view, though of course it is a narrow view. Practice not merely gives fluency but tact in dealing with your audience. Excellent speeches fall flat because they are inappropriate to the occasion. I once heard a young man from whom much was expected make an admirable speech of its kind, which nevertheless

bored everyone. The language was choice, the composition studied, the subject only was at fault: A little more familiarity with the platform than he possessed would have taught the young man that a philosophical disquisition on party government, certain of a favourable reception at the Oxford or Cambridge Union Debating Society, would be quite out of place at a grand open air Demonstration of the Primrose League. Some time since I was present at a considerable gathering of a political association where after dinner we discussed the subject of Fair Trade. About half past ten a young member of our body rose. The secretary whispered to me, "This is a clever chap. I told him I hoped he would speak. We want to give him a chance." We listened to this gentleman with attention for ten minutes, with distraction for ten minutes more, and endured him with impatience for the remainder of the three-quarters of an hour for which he detained us, yet there seemed to practised speakers to be many parts of his discourse which admitted of an effective finish, and some of us were rash enough at these points to cheer in a valedictory style with the object of hinting to the orator the wishes of his audience. Unfortunately he mistook these demonstrations for marks of

approval and pursued his subject with renewed zest. Some of us called up the secretary. "This is really too bad of your friend. Do tell him to stop," we said reproachfully. "I have told him already," replied this functionary, "but he is wound up." When the speaker ultimately ran down there were few of us—and certainly none of us who had missed our trains—who had not formed a poor opinion of his capacity. In both these instances the speakers lacked judgment, and possibly ability to alter on the spur of the moment a studied address so as to suit the exigencies of the occasion, and in consequence neither did justice to himself. At the same time in both cases the speeches, considered as rhetorical compositions, were probably better than the impromptu substitutes which more practised speakers would have delivered in view of the conditions of time and place in which they found themselves. When, therefore, you have acquired the art—or knack if you will—of addressing a public assembly with little or no previous preparation, you may speak effectively without speaking really well. For an impromptu effort you must pull yourself together a bit and collect your wits, a process necessarily of a bracing character, which tells on your speech; your points must be few, and as you

have not thought about them enough to labour them, your treatment of them will be short and simple, which is what people like. Probably, too, the speeches of previous speakers will furnish you with some topics of a genial or perhaps humorous kind which, neatly handled, will put you in touch with your audience. You sit down amid rounds of applause. "Fine speaker, sir." "Magnificent." The local magnates congratulate you, and with sincerity, for you have helped their meeting to "go" well. Yet you yourself, although you naturally enjoy your triumph, are by no means satisfied at heart. You rather pride yourself on the "right use of your oracular tongue and a nice derangement of epitaphs," but you know that in the speech just delivered the right words would not come when they were wanted, and that consequently your vocabulary was scanty and commonplace; that your transitions were effected awkwardly and by the help of a superabundance of conjunctives; that your thoughts were crude; and that in order to catch a cheer you condescended to the use of *ad captandam* arguments; in short, that while you gave your hearers plenty to shout about you left them little to reflect on.

After your election you hope that you will not be

obliged to speak so often and so unexpectedly as when you were a candidate and were compelled to keep yourself before the public as much as possible. You fancy that you will be able to pay attention to the composition of your speeches, and perhaps as a listener derive some valuable hints from the great orators in the House. You will be disappointed of your hope. Invitations will shower down on you to preside at smoking concerts, open bazaars, attend meetings of political associations, support resolutions at conferences, and so forth, many of which you must accept. On all these occasions you will be expected to say at least "a few words," often on the spur of the moment. These demands on you will give you, what indeed you scarcely want, readiness in speaking impromptu, but will not tend to that improvement in your style for which you sadly admit there is much room. At length an opportunity arrives which you intend to benefit by. A distinguished leader of your party is about to deliver an important address in a great commercial centre. The distinguished leader is an orator of the first rank. A carefully-prepared speech from him will be the best of lessons for you. You have a capital seat on the platform close to the distinguished leader. He stumbles a little at first

—they all do—but presently gets into his swing. He is just approaching a ticklish question, and you are on the close watch to notice how he will deal with it, when you feel a smart tap on your shoulder: 'Tis your friend Busy, M.P. “Blank, you are wanted. Overflow meeting in the Drill Hall next door. Two thousand at least. They are hard up for speakers to keep the ball rolling till his lordship can come. The chairman said I was to fetch you at once. There is no time to be lost.” You stifle your annoyance. It is as well to be prompt on such occasions: who knows but what the Party may one day mark your devotion to the cause! On your way you meet a friend returning. He has just spoken, and puts you in spirits as he passes by remarking that they were “deeply depressed” when he left. You arrive to find Perpetual Drop, M.P. on his legs, an orator remarkable for an easy flow of nothing. This gentleman holds the field with indifferent success for half an hour and then succumbs only to repeated intimations conveyed through the medium of his coat tails. Fuming with irritation to think how vilely you have been defrauded, you rise to address a wearied audience who regard you in the light of another stop-gap. The result is not doubtful. At the end of twenty

minutes you sit down with the clear conviction that you never spoke worse in your life.

These experiences would damp the ardour of a less zealous politician, but your spirits are elastic, and you are not yet daunted. You determine now, we will say, to be an attentive listener from your place in the House, and to profit by a careful study of the various oratorical models you will hear there. Perhaps, of all reputations, a reputation for wisdom is the most desired. If this be what you aim at you have an example to follow in Sir Oracle. This honourable member is gifted with a goodly presence, a grave aspect, and a deep voice. It is these qualifications, in the main, I suspect, which have suggested to him the notion that he would make an admirable Speaker. When to such natural advantages are added a double eye-glass, a measured delivery, and a solemn I-come-to-bury-Cæsar style, the effect is in the highest degree impressive. Sir Oracle is not one of those orators who charm with the unexpected. He never, I suppose, had an original idea in his life, but it must be allowed that he makes the most of those that are current in the world. No one pronounces two and two to be four with a greater air of conviction. You may remember that scene in *Great Expectations*, where Mr. Wopsle, the parish clerk, over-estimating his powers of rendering the

dramatic works of Shakespeare, essays the part of Hamlet at a transpontine theatre. Pip and his friend attend on the occasion and when asked to criticise the actor's conception of the character declare it to be "grand and massive." These are the epithets I should apply to the lucubrations of Sir Oracle when he is at his best. As here and there in a remote country district may still be found some ancient dame with a reputation for knowledge and sagacity, entitling her to the appellation of the Wise Woman, so do we in the House of Commons rejoice in the possession of a Wise Man. Should you despair of attaining such excellence as that which I own I have not done justice to in the foregoing description, you can aim a trifle lower. On the other side of the House sits an honourable member—dread Prince of Platitudes—who will teach you how to combine the warmest love of virtue in the abstract with the bitterest hatred of political adversaries in the concrete. You will recognize him best if I give you a sample of his style. "Mr Speaker, the speech to which we have just listened from the honourable member opposite is remarkable for the lack of sympathy it displays with the requirements, and, I may add, wants, of the masses of the people. Sir, I am not surprised that this should be so, for it has

ever been the rôle of the Tory Party, of which party the honourable member is a conspicuous supporter, on the one hand to oppose measures intended to ameliorate the condition of the working men and working women of this country, and on the other to perpetuate those social inequalities, relics of the dark days of feudalism, whereby the rich and the so-called noble have sought to tread under foot the legitimate aspirations of the poor but honest toiler, and despoil him of the hardly-earned fruits of his labour. Such, Sir, I thank God, was not the school in which I learned my first lessons in political wisdom. I, Sir, was always taught, and I have never forgotten the instruction, that no policy could be advantageous to the State which was not founded on justice, that no law was likely to be beneficial to the country at large which was not based on the broad principle of equality, and that no statesman was worthy of the confidence of his fellow men who was blind to the dictates of truth and honour. (Hear, hear.) Holding these views, Sir, I feel that I should be wanting in the duty I owe to the constituency which has returned me to Parliament, were I to fail to raise my voice, humble though it be, in determined protest against the policy enunciated by honourable gentlemen opposite. Sir, I do not deny

to honourable gentlemen opposite the merit of consistency, for the history of this country abounds with examples which prove beyond all question that the Tory Party have ever been the foes of freedom and progress. Now, Sir, I am of opinion that freedom, united with order, is a guarantee of liberty, and that progress, combined with security, is essential to prosperity. (Hear, hear.) This being so, I ask how is it possible for honourable members on this side of the House to associate themselves with politicians—I will not call them statesmen—whose established principle of government is to distrust the people. Sir, you cannot expect the people to trust you unless you trust them. (Hear, hear.) Honourable gentlemen opposite may put their faith in coercion, and rely on force as their only remedy, but let it be our task to pursue a course more consistent with our common Christianity, and by repairing the errors of the past, and redressing the evils of the present, ensure to the unhappy victims of British misrule a prosperous future,” and so on *ad. lib.* Should you be unable on first hearing to follow the drift of this orator’s observations, and apprehend the deep thoughts embedded in his ponderous periods, I advise you to make his acquaintance and beg the loan of the

manuscript of which in the delivery of his addresses he makes such abundant use before he sends it for publication to his local paper. Others there are of less note from whom you may gain useful hints. For example, suppose you entertain the notion of going in, as they call it, for patriotism—rather a losing game though, by the way—then attend the debates on the Army and Navy Estimates. The subjects discussed are highly technical, and, as no one understands them, the few who can talk the jargon of their craft have most of the fun to themselves. This is the time for you to pick up a boisterous sentiment or two from the blood and thunder, shiver your timbers, Rule Britannia speakers, best described in the language of the dockyard as of the “Admiral Class,” sentiments warranted at any time to elicit the loud plaudits of the gallery. Another class there is of a totally different kind, not numerous yet, but, I am sorry to say, increasing; the class of prigs, professors, philosophers, and pedants, whose dreary, dogmatic, and didactic deliverances it will be your ill fate at times to listen to. These gentry are not beloved in any quarter of the House. They are fond of posturing on moral and mental mole-hills of their own raising, whence they look down in pitying scorn on

a less virtuous world. The situation is picturesque and impressive, but calculated to irritate the residue of the human race. You have nothing to learn from such orators as these. Stay, I am wrong. You can learn from them what to avoid.

At this point I feel that you may well reproach me for calling your attention to orators of note indeed, but not in the first rank either as politicians or as speakers. You would say, and naturally enough, that if you were without a guide you should look to profit by the speeches of the leading members of the various political parties of whom the House is composed. I am not sure that in point of oratory there are not less conspicuous members from whom you might learn more than you could from the occupants of the front benches ; but I can understand that, since I am on the subject of the oratory of the House of Commons, to be silent as to the leaders would be regarded, to say the least, as an omission ; so I will make a few remarks about Mr. Gladstone. I select Mr. Gladstone because of his reputation. When I first heard him I was immensely impressed by his powers of speech, but the oftener I hear him the less impressive does he seem. The reason of this I take to be that he has never, since I entered Parliament, had, in a great

speech, a good case to argue. The quality in Mr. Gladstone as an orator which has most struck me, is his mastery of the art, and the consequent ease and confidence with which he speaks. The ordinary hindrances to continued progression which impede less experienced and less gifted orators—mental chaos after the first twenty minutes, exhaustion of subject, deficiency of ideas, or want of suitable words wherewith to express them—do not stand in his way. When once started, it seems to cost him no more effort to talk for three hours than for one. In most speakers you can detect after a time, which varies in duration according to the capacity of the individual, some failure of power, but you might listen long to Mr. Gladstone before you would discover signs of any such mental weakness. It is true that his speeches are not all equally good. One speech differs from another in excellence. For example, when Mr. Gladstone returned from a tour in Bohemia, in the Autumn Session of 1886, in order to take part in the debate on the second reading of Mr. Parnell's Tenants' Relief Bill, he sank, in the speech which he then delivered, very much below his normal level, and consequently laid himself open to an effective reply from Mr. Matthews, the newly-appointed Home

Secretary. But what was observable on this occasion was not a failure of power during the course of the speech, but simply a sustained poverty from beginning to end of it. Mr. Gladstone is specially interesting as a speaker from the fact that he has two styles, allied in their nature, yet distinct, the improvisatory style, and the reflective. As it was said of Swift, by Stella, I think, that there was no subject on which he could not write beautifully, so it may be said of Mr. Gladstone, that there is no subject on which he could not instantly make a speech worth listening to, if not for the matter of it, at least for its language and composition. Occasionally Mr. Gladstone improvises or thinks aloud in the House of Commons, and he is then a curious and instructive study. You may know when he improvises partly by a singular gesture and partly by the recurrence and expression of certain statements and fixed ideas. See him now, casting about as it were for a thought or a word. He raises his right arm above his head, appears to clutch at an invisible object which eludes him, and concludes the strange process by tracing an imaginary line from the frontal to the occipital region with his reverted thumb. After much meditation thereon,

I have come to the conclusion that this action, or combination of actions, is neither more nor less than, the persistency of a habit inherited from a less highly developed progenitor, to wit, arboreal man. Arboreal man, of course, roosted. To be "up a tree" would in his day signify a position of safety, whereas now, by a remarkable but not unprecedented perversion, the phrase indicates an opposite condition. Arboreal man desiring to save himself from falling would naturally raise his arm and grasp the branch above him. Man, in the highest development to which the race has yet attained, to wit, Mr. Gladstone, desiring to save himself from partial failure or complete breakdown by the finding of some thought or some word essential to the continued expression of logical argument, accompanies the mental effort with a reminiscence of the action necessary to his progenitor when in a position not of mental but of physical difficulty. Of the fixed statements or notions, two are specially observable, one, that during fifty years' experience in the House of Commons he never witnessed conduct so unwise, and so contrary to every principle of justice, honour, and virtue, as the conduct of his political opponents at that moment; the other, that had some distinguished statesman,

long since dead—by preference Sir Robert Peel—been then alive, he would have unhesitatingly condemned such conduct and supported the view entertained by Mr. Gladstone himself. When Mr. Gladstone improvises, he speaks virtually without notes, a scratch or two on a sheet of paper, hastily scribbled in the course of the debate, scarcely rising to the dignity of a note. But when Mr. Gladstone speaks reflectively, and obviously after some previous consideration of the subject with a view to speaking on it, his notes are voluminous. He is not singular in this respect. You will be surprised to find how much even the best speakers and most practised debaters depend on their notes. This habit was disapproved by the famous Parliamentary orators of the past. Lord Holland relates how on one occasion he had to undergo the severe trial of speaking in the House of Lords in the hearing of his uncle, Charles James Fox, and how the latter laughed at his hurry and his notes, and bade him be less scrupulous in rounding his sentences and correcting his English. The habit has grown on speakers in the present day, I think, principally because they have less time for preparation than their predecessors had, so that instead of mastering a subject, and speaking

on it with the fulness of knowledge which comes from reflection, they start with some general knowledge of it of a superficial kind, and pick up further information as the debate proceeds, which they jot down at the moment and make the best use of they can when it comes to their turn to take up the ball. Partly also the necessity of notes is occasioned by the form in which debates are carried on in the House. I think it was Johnson again who defined oratory as the power of beating down your adversaries' arguments and putting better in their place. He was accustomed to single combats between masters of logic and fence not likely to advance any but the best arguments on their respective sides; but in the House of Commons, where the speakers are many, and differ in knowledge and capacity, numerous false points are made in a debate which are not worth answering, but which are noted all the same, because an easy and effective exposure of them brings to the refuter some momentary credit, and elicits the encouraging cheer from his own party. The sound arguments in support of, or in opposition to, a question, are always few, and Johnson's definition applies to them when they are dealt with in a closely reasoned speech, such as one is accustomed to hear from

Lord Hartington, who, as a rule, passes over the minor points, the smart handling of which shows off the orator, but furnishes no solid contribution to the debate, and fixes his attention on the main issues. But even Lord Hartington—who doubtless might dispense with notes—thinks it safe, I suppose, to have a sheaf of them, though I have often noticed that he will speak for several minutes without consulting them, and, on his next reference to them, will lay on one side several pages the substance of which he has sufficiently borne in mind to deliver without needing their assistance.

It is clear that many members of the House learn their set speeches nearly, if not quite, by heart. Any one accustomed to speak himself, or to listen to others, can have little difficulty in telling which passages of a speech have been written down, or thought out and committed to memory. In the ordinary intercourse of daily life our phraseology is commonplace, and our vocabulary limited, and the more we mix in general society the more commonplace and the more poverty-stricken our talk. To speak with felicity of expression is to risk the imputation of affectation—the worst of vices in an Englishman's opinion. The rustic, limited as his vocabulary is in consequence of the limited range of his mind, has

a much happier and more discriminating way of expressing himself than his better educated fellow citizens, for he has no critics to fear and no fashion to follow. Sometimes we get such an one on a platform, and always to the delight of an audience who are taken with his quaint way of putting things in what the reporter will describe as a "racy vernacular." We educated folks are ashamed to appear different from others, to be singular even in excellence, so we are commonplace all round. The result is that when we speak in public we have a difficulty in expressing ourselves in terms suitable to the occasion, for the very folks who would ridicule us, and call us fantastic and odd if we picked our words in private conversation, not merely tolerate, but look for a more elevated style from us when we address them from the platform. Consequently most of us, if we would satisfy an audience, and maintain what reputation we have, must either write out our speeches or those parts of them which we desire to be effective and commit them to memory, or must spend much time in thinking them over, so that when we deliver them the words and phrases which have occurred to us in thought, and been selected by us as the most appropriate, may flow as readily to the tongue as the less forcible

synonyms, we should employ if we had to express the same ideas in private conversation. There can be no doubt which of these processes is the better. The man who has well thought out his speech, though he may not have written down a word, will deliver a much more effective address than the man who has written it out, whether he afterwards commit it to memory or no. But the former is much the longer process, and speakers in Parliament have often no time to spare for it. Hence the voluminous notes on which so many are compelled to depend. Now Mr. Gladstone, although he follows the fashion and uses notes, does not, so far as I can judge, require them to anything like the extent that others do for what I may be permitted to term phraseological purposes. He seems to have a complete command of an enormous vocabulary from which, at any moment, he can select the precise words and turns of speech he desires to use. Why such a man possessed of such gifts and such acquirements hampers himself with notes is a question that I should like him, in the interests of future generations of speakers, to answer. Yet with all his mastery of the tongue, it is often said of Mr. Gladstone that, unlike Lord Beaconsfield, he has coined no phrases that will

live. Mr. Gladstone, it is true, is not a witty man. His sense of humour appears not to be keen, though occasionally he allows a dry comment to pass his lips which provokes a smile. He is not ready with a caustic repartee or a stinging sarcasm. He is not a sayer of smart sayings which are in everyone's mouth to-day and forgotten to-morrow. The fact is, he is too busy a man and too much in earnest, even when he is carried away by some theory or some scheme whose merits he alone can descry, to be epigrammatic. Epigrams are the product of a rested brain. It is after men have well slept that their wits are brightest; the dullest intellects are fertile in arguments against getting out of bed. The brain that is curdled with all-night sittings is in no condition to condense the wisdom of many into the wit of one. Hence Opposition speakers are more brilliant than Ministerial, for they have more leisure and more sleep too, since they are not compelled to make a House. But to return to Mr. Gladstone. If he be not a "master of flouts and jeers," it does not follow that he is, therefore, incapable of coining phrases that will live. To be buried in Remains or Jest-books, the common lot of the wittiest epigrams, the smartest repartees, and the pleasantest conceits, is not immortality.

The phrases most likely to live need be neither clever nor striking, but they must be happily turned and easy to remember, and such as may come in handily on many occasions, and adapt themselves readily to a variety of circumstances. When Lord Russell (Lord John) noticed, in the House of Lords, that some statesman whom he had in a certain debate expected to see there was not present, and said of him, paradoxically, that he was "conspicuous by his absence," he coined what became a stock phrase in the language because it supplied a daily want, namely a concise mode of expressing a state of things of frequent occurrence. Now phrases of this kind abound in Mr. Gladstone's speeches. To mention a few—"within measurable distance," "holds the field," "judicious mixture," "the dim and distant future," and so on. In estimating the worth of such phrases as these the fact, however, must not be lost sight of, that their utterance by the most eminent statesman of the day at once gave them currency. We humbler mortals may issue just as good coin but we cannot as easily get it into circulation.

There is no speaker in the House of Commons that approaches Mr. Gladstone in copiousness of vocabulary, in earnestness of manner, and in

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energy of delivery. Mr. Gladstone's chief faults are his diffuseness and his prolixity. A working man whom I knew summed these up admirably in a criticism of a celebrated speech made by Mr. Gladstone many years ago, at Blackheath, which he had heard. He said, "If Mr. Gladstone had spoken a great deal less he would have said a great deal more." Consequently there are, in my judgment, many speakers more impressive. Lord Hartington is an impressive speaker, and has become more so since he has been the acknowledged head of what may be destined to be the most powerful party in the State. He is no orator, if to wrap up fallacies in fine phrases and pass them off for truths be oratory, but he is wonderfully effective. I never heard Lord Hartington until I became a Member of Parliament, and in no public man was I ever more deceived. I had formed a notion, from what I had read of him in the Press, that as a speaker he was a ponderous failure, and that his position in the House was due mainly to the personal regard felt for a politician who numbered honesty amongst his qualifications—that he was, in fact, a sort of Goodman Dull—respectable, especially as the heir to a dukedom, and, like all respectable folks, honourable, but not

interesting. Never was man more mistaken. Of Lord Hartington's great abilities there could, I saw, be no doubt. For statesmanlike grasp of the real questions in issue, for clear arrangement of matter and incisive speech, I consider Lord Hartington, in the present House of Commons, to be unequalled. His delivery is thick and uneven; he has few, if any, graces of voice and action; but he is by no means a monotonous speaker. When he intends to be emphatic he lets you know it, and I am acquainted with no one in the House who can vary his style so aptly to suit the tone of the debate or the subject under discussion. But above all these powers shines conspicuous the straightforward honest character of the English gentleman; and honesty is still the best policy in the House of Commons.

Mr. Chamberlain as a speaker I admire because he is so clear and concise, and because he combines two qualities or powers not often found together, the power to reply readily and effectively, and the power to make a well-arranged opening statement, the latter by far the rarer power of the two. On the Ministerial side of the House Mr. Goschen's style of oratory most resembles Mr. Chamberlain's; but although equally effective in its way, it is not

quite so bright and cheerful. Mr. Robertson, the Lord Advocate, is one of the most polished speakers in the House. If I described his speeches as "neat," I should give a false impression of them, for neatness in a speech suggests some sacrifice of vigour; yet the word occurs to one in this connexion, I suppose, because he is singularly happy in his choice of words, and so conveys delicate shades of meaning with a precision wanting in the speeches of less copious though more boisterous orators. The connoisseur in speeches, who likes his humour, like his wine, dry, will thoroughly enjoy Mr. Robertson's way of enforcing his points. I might mention many other speakers of great excellence, as, for example, Mr. Balfour, who for sustained logical argument and dialectical powers has exceeded all our expectations; but as I am supposing myself to be addressing a Parliamentary novice, I would say to him, Find these out for yourself, and save me the invidious task of distinguishing between their differing merits.

You will now, after some study of the best models, desire to make your first speech. Whilst I should deprecate too great haste in this matter, I should yet warn you against undue delay, lest letting "I dare not, wait upon I would," and

putting off from time to time the terrible moment—and it is to most men a terrible moment—you should lose your nerve and sink into the ranks of the voiceless, the men who have often desired to speak, but have never plucked up courage enough, or who have spoken once and failed, and feared to face failure again. I do not include in this class those useful men who have never had any intention to take a prominent part in the debates, but who do good work on Committees, where their ability, sound sense, and business habits are of great service to the country. These men can speak if they choose, and occasionally in the Committee stage of a Bill or in private business speak briefly and to the point. By the voiceless I mean the men who have the capacity to speak and the desire, but have missed their opportunities, and who now stifle the qualms of conscience which they must sometimes feel with the adage that if speech be silvern, silence is golden.

Your constituents, too, will begin to look for your name in the Parliamentary Reports. Call to mind the circumstances of your own election. Which among your many merits was the one oftenest insisted on by those who advocated your claims at public meetings? Was it not this: that

being a fair speaker, as speakers go, you would not, like their late member, be silent in the House? You can still, I doubt not, recall the impassioned tones of your chief platform supporter: "Return Mr. Blank to Parliament, gentlemen, and you will be represented by a man who will make his voice heard in that Assembly. Mr. Blank will not, like our late member, be a dumb dog. He will not, like the lady in the song (this was always a telling hit), 'sit silently shelling green peas' (loud cheers), but will make his mark in Parliament, and take part in the debates with credit to himself and advantage to the country." Electors who have successfully carried their man like to have their own good judgment endorsed by the popular voice. Their man must advertise himself in some way, so that at the least they may not be reproached by their opponents with having returned a nonentity to Parliament. You can begin modestly by asking a question. Say that you chance on a paragraph in a newspaper wherein is described what seems to be an act of injustice towards an Indian fellow-subject, and you see, as by inspiration, that your opportunity has come. Accordingly, you ask the Under Secretary of State whether his attention has been called to the case of one Ram Chunder

Loblolly Bhoy, a talookdar of Bundelaragbag, in the Jugglepoor district, who is reported to have been fined five rupees by the local magistrate for fishing for nuggers during the close time, and whether such action on the part of the magistrate is not a distinct violation of Article 2001 of the Indian Penal Code. You get your answer, and think no more of the matter until shortly afterwards you encounter an influential supporter, who greets you with effusion, and expresses his delight at seeing your name in the paper as the asker of a question in the House. "Thought you'd make them sit up, sir, eh?" says he, with a chuckle, and as he speaks he wrings your hand warmly, and, inclining his head slightly to one side, gazes at you fondly out of half-closed eyes, as though you were a recent purchase, say a horse, that had more than equalled his expectations. Now these are feelings that a Member of Parliament cannot afford to ignore. Hence, to some extent the protracted debates that generally take place, at the beginning of a Session, on the Address. When one is asked to speak in public without having time to get up a special subject, one always selects "the political situation," because that is a topic which admits of much breadth of treatment. The same

may be said of the general debate on the Address. Speeches can be let off then which have already seen service on the platform or which can be utilized for that purpose afterwards. Consequently men speak on the Address because it is the best opportunity they are likely to have of delivering a carefully prepared oration in the style most familiar to them—the all-over-the-shop style. By-and-by, when the House gets to business, and measures requiring special knowledge come to be considered, speakers of this stamp will leave the field to less gifted beings. But to return to your first speech. You will have no difficulty in finding an opportunity to speak if you do not mind speaking to an empty House on an empty stomach in what is called the dinner-hour—that is, from about 7 o'clock to 9 or half-past. Your chance may possibly come quite unexpectedly. You are listening to the debate, or are occupied with your thoughts, and do not notice how the House thins. Presently you see someone sidling towards you. It is one of the Government Whips. This gentleman has a remarkably pleasant manner, and is so affable too. He asks most kindly whether your cold is better. You have not had a cold, but you reflect that he cannot be supposed to bear in mind every

member's malady, so you reply cheerfully that it is much better. He is quite glad about this. "That's all right. Do you dine here to-night?" You say that you do, but not just yet. He then informs you that a good many members on the Ministerial side are dining out to-night. It is a great shame, when they know the Government want to keep a House; but they will go. By-and-by he becomes more communicative still. He tells you how many supporters of the Ministry are in the House or its precincts, and how many of the Opposition, and implies that in the event of a division it would be a touch-and-go thing, and that even a count might be fraught with peril. He is so confidential in his way that you almost feel as if you were the chosen depository of the Cabinet secrets, and when he affirms that the only safe course is to keep the debate going till "our men" come back, you readily assent. He is down upon you in a twinkling. "Then we may depend on you, if no one rises, to keep the ball rolling. That's all right," and off he goes in search of another victim to "follow on." Your first impulse is to fly the scene, but you resist this as unmanly; your second, to acquire some Dutch courage at the bar in the lobby. Before, however, you can make up your

mind, the member who is addressing the House gathers up his papers preparatory to an effective finish. He sits down, and there is a moment's pause. You are on the point of rising, when up jumps another of Mr. Parnell's young men. What a relief! You breathe again. Clearly it would be preposterous to remove the representatives of Ireland from the Imperial Parliament. How lost we should feel without them! But even Irish eloquence has its limits, and when this gentleman resumes his seat you know that your time has come. You rise, and are named by the Speaker. The prospect before you is not encouraging. On the Ministerial bench there may be a law officer or two, and perhaps a junior lord. The front Opposition bench is a desert; but the scene behind it is more animated, for there you are treated to an exhibition of that nightly spectacle, the vanishing member. Your audience becomes scantier and scantier. You catch a glimpse in the doorway of that most trusted of your friends, Trueman. Surely he will support you! No, he has gone with the rest. You fancy you guess his errand, and that presently he will return, bearing in his sympathetic hand the glass of water which each of you has long since pledged himself to supply to

the other in his need. You are wrong. Whilst you, parched and husky, are ploughing your way through your notes, your friend is cracking a bottle, as they say in the old farces, of dry champagne, with a genial acquaintance to whom he pleasantly imparts the information that when he left the House poor Blank was up with not a soul to listen to him. To support a man in the dinner-hour is the last test of friendship, and should never be exacted. Well, it is over at length. You get a nod from the Treasury bench in kindly recognition of the fact that you have answered the call of duty, and you have the report in the newspapers to look forward to. You open your *Standard*, say, next morning, to find the following record of your first appearance : "The debate was continued by Mr. O'Trigger, Mr. O'Moreso, and Mr. Blank." But perhaps you consider yourself too great a swell to be utilized in this fashion. You have, or you think you have, a reputation which should secure you against such a fate. At College you were president of the Union. You have since figured so creditably on the platform that you set a fancy value on your public appearances, and decline to speak at any but big meetings. In your own words, you draw the line at fifteen hundred. Any

lesser audience you feel to be beneath your merits. A judicious hint or two in the proper quarter will soon spread abroad a knowledge of your views on this matter, and you will not be troubled by the Whips. They are mortal, and no fonder of a snub than other men. Your object I take to be to make an effective speech in a full House. I tell you candidly that I doubt the wisdom of your policy. You had much better take your chance when you can ; speak to the point on a subject of which you know something, and not trouble about your style or the impression you will create on the House. But as I am sure that I should not convince you, I will not argue the question. You take your own course, then, and await your opportunity. It may be long in coming. A friend of mine nursed a glass of water for a fortnight, and then never let off his speech. The worst of this expectant attitude is that the longer you wait the less inclined you feel to take advantage of the opportunity when it does occur. You get sick, too, of the whole business, and your speech does not improve by keeping. Every day's continuance of the debate suggests additions to or subtractions from it, until at length the original design is so metamorphosed that you hardly recognise it. Then, by standing on your

merits, so to speak, or the order of your going, you excite curiosity and arouse expectation. Failure in such a case is the more to be dreaded. However, you persevere. Your notion is that since there are many good speakers in the House, and since most questions that come up for debate are so well worn that nothing new can be said on them, your best chance of attracting attention and making a speech something out of the common way is to adopt a striking style. *Le style, c'est l'homme*, you repeat to yourself. Ultimately, your opportunity comes. In a fairly full House, which grows fuller as you proceed, you achieve a decided success; in the slang of the day, you "score." From the first you have the House with you. Your epigram might have been composed yesterday, it seems so crisp. You introduce your humorous interlude with the light touch of a master. You enforce your argument without labouring it, and you lead up to your retort with such skill that it has all the air of an impromptu. *Summa ars est celare artem*. This hackneyed quotation reminds me that you make one mistake. You give a long and not well-known passage from a classical writer of antiquity in the original Latin. You should remember that to know Latin and

Greek is in the present day the mark of a pedant, and that the only use of the Ancients is to supply figures of speech to the Moderns. But, this blemish excepted, if you do not quite come up to your expectations, you do not fall far short of them. A Minister who follows you later on pays a handsome compliment to the honourable member whose "brilliant contribution to the debate" must, he feels sure, have been appreciated by all sections of the House. You receive a hurried note or two of glowing commendation from some more or less prominent members which you read with a warm gush of pride. So this is fame! How good it is! And how easily acquired! You live on your speech, and on the flattering comments in the Press, for weeks, and you think yourself, what some have already styled you, the coming man. In a month or two's time it dawns upon you that your speech, although as fresh as ever in your own recollection—and no wonder, for you often inwardly repeat it with never-failing satisfaction—has nearly, if not quite, passed out of the minds of others. You begin to suspect that to achieve fame is one thing, to retain it another; and that the favourable impression created by your first essay will be dispelled if you do not shortly follow it up. To do

this needs even a greater effort than your first speech entailed, for you are now as much afraid of yourself as you then were of the House of Commons. You dread to fall below the high standard you then reached.

However, I will assume that you have nerve enough to make a second attempt. You will try, of course, to repeat your success on similar lines. It is egregious folly on your part, but you will commit it. You compose your epigram, you study your light banter, you manufacture the source of interruption which will bring in your retort, you search the Scriptures for your humorous analogy. In short, you make ready to out-do yourself in the completest way. At length your chance comes. There is a little stir of expectancy as you rise, which pleases you. You make what you think a good start with something clever. It falls flat. Your friends even are mute. The House does not like clever men at any time, and least when they show off their cleverness. You proceed, and presently get a cheer or two, but they have not the right ring about them. The House knows by this time that your main object is not so much to discuss in an argumentative style the subject of debate, as to win applause in the way in which you

won it on a former occasion. Now this is treatment that the House resents. It is not a theatre for young stars to scintillate in whenever they please, but a place of business, in which grave affairs of State have to be transacted. It is all very well for a new member to make a hit once. He has to show off his parts, and give a taste of his quality, but after this he must take his place in the ranks with the rest and go to work simply and straightforwardly on the matter in hand. His real merits, if he has any, will be discovered and valued soon enough.

But to return to yourself. You are now conscious that the House is in a very different mood from that in which it was when you first addressed it. This puts you in a fluster. Your good points do not seem quite so good now, and you are half-ashamed to put them. Your epigram smells of the lamp. You never even get off your retort, for when you challenged contradiction no one spoke. There is a buzz of conversation around you, and you just catch the words, "Making a fool of himself, eh?" which do not reassure you. You forget your composed sentences and wander. Presently a cry of "Question" is raised. You are plucky, and stammer on, when "Order, order, order!" resounds

through the House. Whilst you are wondering what it all means, a friendly hand pulls you down, for the Speaker is up. "I must remind the honourable gentleman that his observations are somewhat discursive, and must request him to keep to the point." Discursive! Good heavens! you, who pride yourself on the neatness and conciseness of your periods, discursive! You feel disposed to give in, and remain in a sitting posture, but a neighbour whispers, "All right, old man, go on." So you rise again, signify your intention to obey the ruling of the Speaker, an announcement that every member makes when the Chair interposes, as if he had any option in the matter, and resume your discourse. It is, however, all over with you now. You struggle on bravely for a second or two, but presently go dead lame, as lame as a cab-horse, and after a shambling finish sit down—on your hat. Probably you have, in truth, done not so badly as you suppose, but what crushes you is the contrast you draw in your mind between the striking success of your first speech, and the failure of your second. You recover from your depression a bit under the sympathy of your friends who are very hearty in their condolences. "Do you good, old fellow;" "Just what you wanted to take the

conceit out of you ;” “Never say die, my boy ; better luck next time.” If you take this last advice, you may yet do well, but the best thing that could happen to you would be for someone to take you by force and compel you to talk twaddle in Committee every night for a month ; the worst, that you should take your failure too much to heart, become soured, blame everybody but yourself for your shortcomings, and ultimately become a member of the noble band of Neglected Geniuses.

Bittersweet is a Neglected Genius. Hear him now, in his favourite corner of the Smoking Room. “If this sort of thing goes on I shall vote against the Government some fine day. Indeed, I have a good mind to tell old Smith so myself. (The Genius always affects familiarity with the great.) It would serve them jolly well right too, 'pon my soul it would.” He has been recounting at after-dinner length the history of his vain endeavours to secure the countenance of the Ministry to some scheme of legislation which would cover him with undying fame, and thus concludes the sad recital. It is a way with the Neglected Genius to threaten a wavering of allegiance in order to draw the attention of the leaders of his party to his unrequited merits. He seldom puts the threat into

execution, though, to show what he could be capable of if driven to extremities, he will sometimes give an earnest of worse deeds by walking out of the House on the eve of a division. 'Tis then that the neglected one is seen at his best. "Here you are! here are all your fine legislative qualities, all your high-toned Constitutional principles a-growing and a-blowing," he seems to say, as with a modest *mens-conscia-recti* air he sails down the House and sniffs the freedom without. The Whips in the doorway, men not wanting in courage in the ordinary way, are taken quite aback by the display of such independence and virtue. "Aye lobby?" they say to him mechanically; but he heeds them not. As he pushes through the crowd of senators struggling in the entrance his lip curls and the words of the poet elevate him: "Be not like dumb driven cattle—be a hero in the strife." When the division is over he affects a kindly interest in the result, to intimate that he is mortal like the rest of us. "I did not vote, you know," he explains, with just a shade of pity for the inferior beings who did.

It may be suspected, from admissions let slip in unguarded moments, that the Neglected Genius is occasionally influenced by motives more personal

than patriotic. "I'll tell you what it is," he will say, "it is of no use to be too civil to your party leaders. You must be rough on them if you want them to respect you. Look at Randolph. How did he make his reputation? Did he sugar his leaders? Not a bit of it. Gave them pepper, sir, pepper. Talk of ability! Well, I don't deny him ability—he can pick other people's brains with any man—but it wasn't ability that brought him to the front. No, sir, it was impudence—cheek, if you like it better;" and so on. Although the Neglected Genius seldom condescends to a speech, especially if his merits in that direction have been misappreciated in the early stage of his career, he is yet a believer in the policy of keeping oneself well in evidence. It is he who questions Ministers in a minatory style. Indeed, it is quite a treat to hear him, he makes so brave a show over the business. "Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to ask my right honourable friend the Secretary of State for the Circumlocution Department question number nine hundred and ninety-nine which stands on the paper in my name," is a mouthful which, well rolled over the tongue, can be brought out in highly effective style. By a little art, too, the sensation may be prolonged. It is not easy to satisfy the Genius. He is not to be

put off with a soft answer, and no one is keener than he in scenting a chance for further display. Hardly has the Minister resumed his seat, or as often as not found an uneasy perch on the knees of a much crowded colleague, than the Genius is at him again. "Mr. Speaker, Sir, arising out of the answer of my right honourable friend, I beg to ask my right honourable friend whether he wishes the House to understand that the Government assent to the proposition that the whole is greater than the part?" Loud cheers from the Opposition greet this query. It is felt to be an embarrassing moment for the Minister. That official, desirous to give as small a handle as possible to his questioner, is commendably brief. "Yes, sir," he replies, half rising from his comrade's knee. "Then, sir," triumphantly exclaims the Genius, "I beg to give notice that in consequence of the extremely unsatisfactory nature of the answer of my right honourable friend, I shall take an early opportunity of calling the attention of the House to this subject, and shall move a resolution." Cheers again from the other side of the House. Crawley on the front Opposition bench nudges Jawley and whispers, "They are going to pieces over there. See how their own men distrust them. Hear,

hear." The one side of the House always cheers the Neglected Geniuses of the other side. It is kindly meant. It is to encourage them in their career of usefulness. Neglected Geniuses do not as a rule secure that appreciation of their merits which they aim at by such tactics as these. Do not, therefore, let your sense of disappointment at your failure or your dread of another fiasco induce you to join these blighted beings. Besides, the profession is overcrowded.

It is not, however, failure and its consequences only that may ruin your prospects of political advancement. Success of a certain kind may be equally fatal to them. Say you have some sense of humour; and that by what you deem a happy chance you find the House in the right vein one night and tickle it to laughter with your way of dealing with the subject under discussion. A little will do it, for we are ordinarily so dull that the thinnest joke is a relief, and takes as readily as the weakest judicial witticism in a court of law, though that of course is helped to "go" by the sycophantic snigger of the junior bar. No power is more fascinating in its exercise than the power to excite one's fellows to laughter, and once successfully put forth, the temptation is almost irresistible.

to resort to it oftener and oftener, until at length the member who yields to such temptation comes to be regarded as a professional joker, or licensed jester, and nothing more. The Member of Parliament who thus deliberately lays himself out to amuse the House forfeits all other claims on its attention. He may be as able as you please, he may hold the soundest views on the greatest political questions, but once let him figure as a *farceur* and the House will never suffer him to be anything else. We have a few celebrities of this kind in the House now. Whenever they rise we expect them to keep us on the broad grin, and feel defrauded of our just due should they, by some misjudgment of their true position, chance to sink into sense. That the jokers who are something more than mere jokers—men who know that, if it were not for the fatal reputation they have created for themselves, they might take a useful part in the transaction of the business of the country, and even aspire to guide the national policy—feel acutely the false position in which they have placed themselves, is manifest by the piteous efforts they make to escape from it. Unable to keep the attention of the House when they address it in any style but the jocose, they write long

letters to the newspapers, in which, with all the gravity of genuine statesmen, and often with marked ability, they criticise the policy of Ministers and of the leaders of their own party, and enunciate their own; or they parade on platforms as reformers of abuses, redressers of evils, economists, financiers, and so forth—all to no purpose; their position in the House is not one whit bettered; they can secure no following. No party, no section of a party, however small, will submit to be led by its funny men.

Let me conclude with a word or two of warning. Should you, whose aim I trust may be higher than that of amusing the House of Commons, be unable sometimes to follow the drift of a speaker's remarks, or fathom his meaning, recollect that a Member of Parliament is obliged to weigh his words (often to find them wanting, I doubt not), and to express not the opinions he really holds, but such as will give least offence to his constituents, or compromise him least when some question now only looming in the dim and distant future comes within the range of practical politics. (See how useful Gladstone's phrases are!) Thus many representatives of agricultural constituencies will dally with Fair Trade, although in their hearts they may be convinced

that any form of Protection would be disastrous to the commerce of the country. The man who spoke the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, in the House of Commons, would make a reputation by the singularity of his conduct. Again, you may wonder that some members, clear-headed enough in the ordinary way, straightforward enough in the ordinary way, are at times so difficult to understand as to their drift and meaning. Well, Demosthenes found a mouthful of pebbles no impediment to distinct utterance, but it is not recorded of him that he tried to speak with his tongue in his cheek.

THE EXTRA-PARLIAMENTARY DEMANDS ON MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT.

SOME time since, in my capacity of Member of Parliament for a certain constituency, I assisted at the opening of a new club intended to advance the prospects of the political party to which I belong. In the course of my remarks, being somewhat gruelled for matter, and knowing, from experience, that the mention of his lordship's name would be a certain draw, I expressed a hope that Lord Randolph Churchill might one day be induced to visit the club and address its members. Resounding cheers greeted this sentiment, and shortly afterwards, as I was leaving the building, two or three young men pressed round and eagerly demanded whether I thought there was any speedy prospect of the event I had indicated taking place. To them I was compelled to admit that I feared there was no such prospect. Marking their evident disappointment, I

explained that when a statesman had reached the position attained by Lord Randolph Churchill his speeches would naturally assume the character of declarations of policy, and that, consequently, regard for the public interest would compel him to silence much oftener than might be the case were he in Opposition, or were he a less distinguished member of his party. I was reminded of this incident on reading a speech of the noble lord wherein he congratulated his hearers on the absence of that flood of oratory which in the Gladstonian period used to inundate the country during the Recess. This, indeed, is not the first intimation he has given of his opinion that the time of a statesman may be better employed in learning the duties of his office, or in mastering the principles of good government, than in making speeches on platforms. It will be remembered that when the Conservatives took office in the summer of 1885, Lord Randolph Churchill declined to canvass Woodstock in person (and so in the opinion of party managers ran the risk of losing his seat there), on the ground that he had just accepted the Indian Secretaryship, and felt it to be imperative upon him to acquaint himself with his new duties, and inform himself with regard to the important subjects he would have

to consider. At a subsequent period, too, it was announced that he had refused invitations to address public audiences for the reason that the time of the Ministry would be fully taken up with the work of preparing the measures they proposed to submit to Parliament. Both by precept and example, therefore, Lord Randolph Churchill gave his followers sound practical advice—advice simple, indeed, and to be summed up in the old adage, *ars longa, vita brevis*. To understand the science of government we must study it, and this we cannot do if we fritter away the brief life which is here our portion in the frequenting of political gatherings and the making of political speeches. I wish his followers, and, indeed, all who interest themselves in public affairs, would take this advice to heart, for I venture to affirm that the demands made on the time of a Member of Parliament both by his own constituents and by others, if he be an effective speaker, are so many and various that if he were to meet a considerable portion only of them it would be at the sacrifice of much more important duties.

A man's own constituents have naturally great claims upon him, but there is a tendency unduly to press even them, and often with the best intentions towards the representative himself. After the

opening of the club which I mentioned at the beginning of this article I walked home with a constituent of whose devotion to his party and to myself I entertain no doubt, and whose services have been freely rendered and most valuable to me. This gentleman, talking about the club and the benefits to be expected from it, said, with perfect simplicity I am sure, "What a capital thing it would be if you could look in at the club of an evening once or twice a week or so. It would make you very popular, and help to keep the party together wonderfully." I fear I was too vehement in my reply, for I said, "God bless my soul, what are you thinking of? From 52 to 104 evenings a year spent popularity-hunting at a political club! The notion is preposterous, and not to be entertained for a moment." The good soul, not to be driven quite off his point, murmured something to the effect that I need not spend the "whole evening" at the club. It would suffice if I "just looked in, don't you know"—a modification of his original suggestion which I did not think fit to notice, and the subject dropped. Now, the worst of it is that this gentleman was not merely speaking with a view to my interests and those of the political party to which we belong, but was expressing the sentiments

of a great number, perhaps the majority, of my supporters in the constituency. Their idea is that it is the first duty of a Member of Parliament to nurse his constituency so effectually in various ways as to make his re-election sure on the next occasion that he should have to seek the suffrages of the voters. I need not argue that this is an imperfect conception of the chief functions of a legislator, whose highest duty it should surely be to master as thoroughly as he can the principles of Constitutional government, and to inform himself on the main subjects which are likely to engage the attention of the Legislature. But, however imperfect a conception of a Member's duties it may be, there can be no doubt of its prevalence. Apart from its tactical aspect, it forms the basis of, or the excuse for, most of the demands which are made on the time and purse of a Member of Parliament. The invitations which are showered down on one to open bazaars, take the chair at meetings of all sorts and kinds, and say a few words on this occasion or that, almost invariably state, either directly or by implication, that political support may be expected to follow from their acceptance. As a fact the promoters are mainly anxious for the presence of a more or less conspicuous individual likely to attract

others, and who, if unable to come in person, will supply the deficiency with a donation to the funds of the institution in which they may be severally interested. From their point of view their conduct is intelligible enough, but, in their desire to further various good objects, they do not sufficiently consider certain truisms, namely, that there is a limit to human capacity, that a man cannot be in two places at once, and that, if he accede to all the public demands that are made on him, he cannot sit quietly at his desk and study as he should the bearings of grave political questions.

I am far, indeed, from saying that a Member of Parliament should not, from time to time, come amongst his constituents. I hold it to be essential that he should do so, not only in order to keep in touch with them, but also to learn their views on matters of local interest. It would be an excellent plan for the persons who have a practical knowledge of the wants of a particular district to assemble now and then for the purpose of discussing those wants, and to invite the attendance of their representative. At present a Member of Parliament has to glean bits of opinion here and there as best he may in casual conversation with individuals, some of whom may be ill-informed, whilst others, having private

interests to serve, may be biassed in their views. Local debating clubs, or parliaments, might be useful in this respect if local subjects were discussed in them by practical men; but this is seldom the case. The questions for debate are usually well worn, and such as have a general and not a local bearing. For instance, I have before me a notice of the subject which, at the moment of my putting these words on paper, is in course of discussion in a local parliament. I find it to be the notorious Bradlaugh case revived, and I am tempted to think, although my absence from the scene may be commented on (for I believe I am a member of the Government), that I am more usefully engaged at home than I should be were I taking part in so profitless a debate. The most frequent speakers in these assemblies are young men whose chief aim is to practice oratory, or old stagers who speak on every subject without knowing more of one than of another. The business men who are familiar with the wants of a district do not frequent such institutions. There is not enough reality about them for practical men, and if there were, such men would probably prefer to spend an hour or two of well-earned leisure at a place of amusement rather than at a debating society. If in some informal way a

Member of Parliament could occasionally meet those of his constituents who were best informed of the wants of the locality and talk over matters quietly with them, he would be the last person to grudge the demand such conferences might make on his time, seeing that one hour's conversation might save him many of laborious and, perhaps, fruitless study.

It is not therefore of the, so to speak, legitimate calls upon a Member of Parliament that I complain, but of the illegitimate. Look, for example, at the public dinners he is expected to attend. Political *réunions* are, of course, a necessity. A banquet arranged in order to give an opportunity to a leading statesman to rally his forces, or deliver an opportune declaration of policy, ought to be well attended by his supporters, and an annual dinner may be the means of keeping together the members of a valuable political organization; but in many ways besides these this banqueting business is, in my humble judgment, overdone. For instance, the leading adherents, say, of Mr. Blank, desire to celebrate his election and glorify themselves by giving him a dinner. The promoters of the entertainment naturally wish to make the affair a success. A sure means of attaining this end is to be able to announce

that Mr. Blank will be supported on the occasion by a number of public men well known in the political world. On the principle of "nothing venture, nothing have," invitations are boldly sent to a Cabinet Minister or two. Failing these and other lesser celebrities, who can plead the pressure of official duties, the organizers of the dinner have to fall back on mere ordinary Members of Parliament. Perchance Mr. Blank himself may have attended some similar celebrations in other constituencies. If this be so, no time is lost in writing to the representatives of such constituencies to remind them that one good turn deserves another, and to express a hope that as Mr. Blank was present at the banquets given in their honour, so they also will support him on a like occasion. Personal friends of Mr. Blank in the House, too, will be looked up, as also any members who may happen to be connected, however remotely, with the constituency he represents. Ultimately these labours will be rewarded, and some dozen or so of legislators will waste a whole evening because they do not like, or do not think it politic, to resist the pressure put on them to swell the triumph of Mr. Blank and his party managers. In boroughs, smoking concerts have lately come into fashion in connexion with political organiza-

tions, and the member for the division is expected to take the chair at these social gatherings once or twice in the course of the season, and if he be popular and good-natured, his services in a similar capacity will be in request in other constituencies besides his own. The very considerable extension of the Primrose League throughout the country has greatly multiplied the demands on the time of Conservative members, as has also the new scheme of dividing the country, for the purposes of political organization, into district unions federated with a central union in London. I speak not of church openings, missionary meetings, agricultural dinners, the *fêtes* of friendly societies, and so on, for their claims are long established and well recognized. I content myself with putting it thus—that the extraneous duties of or demands upon individual members of Parliament in these latter days have increased, are increasing, and ought to be diminished if the country wishes to have an efficient House of Commons.

The average Member of Parliament, be it remembered, is either a professional man, or a commercial man, or a man whose private concerns are of sufficient magnitude and importance to him to require a fair share of his attention. In each case

he is much occupied with matters external to his legislative labours. It may be said that men with these ties should not seek to enter Parliament, and that only men who can devote their whole time to their constituents and their parliamentary duties should have seats in the House of Commons. I entirely dissent from this view. We want practical men in that House, men with a varied experience of life, self-made men, men who in their struggle upwards from poverty to wealth have necessarily acquired habits of business—habits which they will retain when called upon to deal with the affairs of an Empire. An assembly containing a great proportion of such men will faithfully represent the wants, the feelings, the sympathies, and the opinions of average men and women. Now, men of this description have generally in the course of their professional and commercial career also served a kind of apprenticeship to parliamentary life in various public offices. The qualities which have contributed to their success in their several avocations will, in most cases, point them out to their fellow-citizens as men fitted to take a useful part in the local government of the country. There will be among them justices of the peace, Poor Law guardians, churchwardens, managers of schools,

trustees of various institutions, and members of divers local boards. It is even desirable that so far as possible they should continue to hold these offices after their election to seats in the Legislature, in order that they may from time to time renew their acquaintance with and their knowledge of local life. Should county boards be constituted, and local government generally be remodelled on larger lines, prominence in the local parliament will naturally mark out a man as fitted to play an effective part in the Parliament at Westminster. In any case what I may term the business members of the House will be men who, from some or all of the various causes I have mentioned, will be occupied in important affairs, which they should not for light reasons be forced to neglect.

There are, of course, a number of useful and promising members of the House who, with ample means and leisure, choose to devote themselves to the service of the State, rather than spend their days in amusement or inglorious ease—eldest sons of peers, for example, and the like. These, from their position in society, are generally men of the world, and by dint of application many may acquire habits of business. There are, too, a few who owe their seats mainly to their connexion with the

organization of their party. Fluent platform speakers, they have for years been engaged in promoting the interests of others in divers constituencies, until at length, rewarded by invitations to contest seats in their own right, they find themselves in the haven where they would be. But the business men, as I must call them for distinction's sake, constitute by far the most numerous, as they are the most valuable, section of the House; and if we were to exclude them on the ground of their inability to devote their whole time to Parliament and their constituents, by whom must they necessarily be succeeded? By elderly men retired from active life, by men of leisure unversed in business, or, worst of all, by professional politicians, who hope that a seat in the House may in some way conduce to their worldly advantage. At present the Par-nellites are the only professional politicians in the House, and neither their example here nor that of worthies of a similar stamp across the water is calculated to impress thoughtful men with the value of their services to any but themselves. The point I am now enforcing, therefore, is this: that the most useful Members of Parliament are the men of business; that men of business cannot have acquired a right to be so styled without contracting

public and private ties which, especially if they are in the prime of life, must continue to engage some of their attention; and that, consequently, although all feel the inconvenience and the harm of the perpetual calls on the time of a Member of Parliament, some of which I have indicated, the most useful men in the House are the most injuriously affected by them.

I have said that the efficiency of the House is likely to be impaired unless the extraneous demands on members are diminished, and the proposition is almost self-evident. The best class of men of business will avoid a political life if it is to involve such sacrifices as those I have mentioned, and the House will lose their experience and knowledge of the world. Many of the men who are willing to serve their country in Parliament will be compelled to confine their attention to a single subject for want of time to attain that mastery of affairs and that capacity for grasping the salient points of a situation which distinguish the statesman from the mere politician. Some of these effects are visible now. How few men there are in the House sufficiently grounded in the principles of government as applied to a highly-civilized, and therefore complex, society, to be able to expose on the instant the

fallacies latent in some wild theory pompously propounded by a pragmatical professor! What is the result? Why, that individual rights, themselves the foundation of true liberty, are in the very name of this same liberty whittled away because those who would defend them, having no clear notion of the line they ought to take, waste their energies in combating details, only to find, when the struggle is over, that they have virtually conceded the principles for which their adversaries contend. Even leading statesmen, men whose capacity to refute error none can doubt, often exhibit a large spirit of compromise in regard to questions which ought to admit of none, for the reason, I imagine, that they have to take into account the ignorance of their own supporters—for it is ignorance, and not impartial discrimination, which, when all sound argument is on one side only of a controversy, admits that much is to be said on the other. The single-subject men or specialists are with us now, and are on the increase, but I doubt if we are much the wiser for them; we are certainly not the happier, for they are most of them bores. There must always be men better informed on certain subjects than on others. On legal matters one naturally looks for guidance to the lawyers. But I do not refer to these. I refer

to men who, owing to the mass of extraneous work thrown upon Members of Parliament, abandon the hope of attaining a statesmanlike grasp of affairs, and deliberately apply themselves to the study of some one question, often a very small one, to the neglect of all others, so that on that question at any rate they may establish a reputation. In so far as the study of their selected subject gives them a mastery of facts it is useful ; but the common run of specialists exhibit a tendency to take a contracted view even of their selected subject, and to twist their facts to suit that view. Mere knowledge of their subject does not content them. They want to be thought authorities upon it, and they are consequently forced to take up a particular line or mode of dealing with the subject which shall distinguish their treatment of it from that of others, and announce theirs as the only remedies likely to abate the ills that may affect it. Nothing can exceed the pedantic airs which some of these specialists give themselves. I was talking to one of them some time since, and happened to hazard an opinion on a matter on which most educated persons are fairly well informed, in ignorance that I had touched on his hobby. I shall not soon forget the superior manner in which, without deigning to:

pursue the discussion, he suppressed me. "Ah," said he, taking his cigar from his mouth, "that's my subject, you know." Then he replaced his cigar and gave it his attention.

Besides, it is an evil that certain subjects should be appropriated by certain men by no means in all cases the fittest to deal with them, because, by a sort of unwritten etiquette or feeling of courtesy, other men hesitate to take a leading part in the handling of questions, which, session after session, have been supported by the same advocates. Who would deprive Mr. Labouchere of his ewe lamb? Yet, who can doubt that if a serious attack upon the House of Lords were really intended, some weightier politician should have the conduct of it? The fact, too, that the specialists are, I may say, without exception, men not in the first rank of statesmen—and I doubt if a single instance could be adduced of a specialist rising to the first rank—shows that this concentration of energies on one subject, whereby some members are enabled to bear the pressure of numerous extra-parliamentary engagements, can only have a limited application if the country is to be served by its best men. Great questions of policy, too—foreign, imperial, British, financial, commercial, and so on—on all of which a

Member of Parliament, if he have not to express an opinion, has at least to give a considered decision, do not admit of the same easy mastery as the favourite subjects of the specialists—capital punishment, anti-vaccination, contagious diseases, local option, and the like. Without, therefore, pursuing the matter further, and adducing, as I might, instances in detail of impaired efficiency in the deliberations and work of the House of Commons due to the unreasonable calls upon the time and attention of members from outside sources, I think I have said enough to show that an evil exists, and that the best way to remedy it, if I may use a phrase borrowed from a section of the House for which I have but scant respect, is to leave Members of Parliament “severely alone.”

SOME OF OUR CORRESPONDENTS.

BEFORE I became a Member of Parliament, I had, in common with the bulk of my fellow-creatures, endured much for the privilege of flourishing in what will be known to the historian of the future as the Circular Age; but when I was entitled to append the letters M.P. to my name, the communications that reached me by every post, comprised, besides the ordinary run of prospectuses, with which I was familiar, a vast number of appeals for support and assistance, which but for my public position I should probably not have received, or, having received, should have turned a deaf ear to. In my canvass of my present constituency—the Great Western, or Little Witley Division of Hampshire—I was not specially struck with the thews and sinews of the younger part of the population; but there must be some noticeable athletes among them, to judge from the number of associations my division

contains for the advancement of manly sports. I would as soon trust myself on an albatross as on a bicycle, yet at this very moment I am president of at least a dozen clubs of "cyclists," and next week I have to present prizes to successful competitors on the "cinder path" (I believe this is the sporting term) for their proficiency in what I shall be forced to describe as a delightful pursuit which nothing but my devotion to my country prevents me from indulging in. Cricket an Englishman is, of course, bound to support and profess an admiration for, and I own that I like to look on at a game, though I never was an adept at wielding "the willow"—again the sporting phrase. I shall not lack opportunities of gratifying this taste if each of the clubs of which I am president, or patron, or honorary member, expects me to attend its matches. I thought clergymen were the most persistent beggars in existence, and I shall have a word to say in respect to them presently, but the young athletes run them close. They are more wary, too. They do not unblushingly ask for money, but they are convinced that if the name of a person so justly eminent as myself were to be announced as the president of the All Muggletonian Cricket Club, that institution—now, they regret to say, far from flourishing—would

at once spring into new life again. Say I consent. It is then, I reflect, midwinter; I shall certainly not be asked for a subscription till the next summer. Write me down an ass. In a week's time I receive an invitation to attend a concert (under my own distinguished patronage) in aid of the funds of the All Mugglestonian Cricket Club, together with a bundle of tickets—five shillings each—which I am requested to pay for and distribute among my friends. But not cricket and bicycle clubs alone engross me. The Royal Rovers (hare and hounds), the Reckless Rushers (football), are but types of many kindred associations of ardent youths who all behold in me the sole source of their success in the future. If I will but become a member (honorary), not merely will all manly sports, of which they are sure I must be a staunch upholder, receive an immense impetus, but (and here is where the artfulness comes in) the personal popularity which would attach to me in consequence could not fail to be advantageous in certain contingencies “which the present aspect of the political horizon suggests may not be far distant.”

I lay no special stress on race meetings, hunt and tradesmen's balls, bazaars, and so on, because all the resident gentry, in common with myself, are

called upon to support these, but there are many appeals made to me from distant and unknown quarters which they escape,

“Who taught that heaven-directed spire to rise?
‘The Man of Ross,’ each lisping babe replies,”

So wrote Pope. If the Man of Ross lived in our day, he would proceed on quite different lines. I assume, for the purpose of illustration, that the Man of Ross was a clergyman and rector of the town which his benevolent deeds have immortalized, though, as a fact, I believe he was a layman. He might adopt various lines. This would be an effective one—

“THE WYE TOUR. Important and Interesting.”

“No one who has traversed the lovely valley of the Wye can have failed to notice, towering conspicuously above the picturesque little town of Ross, and suggesting the holiest reflections by its heavenward direction, the elegant spire of the venerable parish church. Close inspection of this ancient pile would, however, reveal the fact that this splendid monument of the piety of our forefathers was rapidly falling into decay. Such, indeed, was the case but a short time since. So ruinous was the

condition of this beautiful edifice—a chaste specimen of the Florid Gothic order—that the rector, the Rev. John Kyrle, resolved to have it thoroughly examined, with a view, if necessary, to its complete restoration. He accordingly consulted that eminent architect, Mr. Queerson, F.R.S., F.A.S., F.S.A., &c., &c., who gave it as his opinion that not only was the spire in such a dangerous condition as to require to be taken down and rebuilt, but that the whole edifice needed extensive renovation.”

Here would follow a summary of the report of the eminent architect, including the estimated cost of the restoration, and further statements to the effect that a certain sum (wholly insufficient) having been subscribed, the work was commenced, extensive additional repairs were found necessary, and large “extras” incurred, so that in the end, the original estimate having been greatly exceeded, when the church was reopened (by the Lord Bishop of the diocese), there was a debt upon it of an enormous amount. The appeal would conclude somewhat in this way: “This debt has since been reduced by the sum of £1 17s. 9d., the proceeds of the sale to the contractor of the old oaken fittings, which have been replaced by neat structures in pitch-pine; but with

this exception, no substantial reduction in the liabilities incurred, amounting to over £6000, has yet been effected. In these circumstances, the rector confidently appeals to all supporters of our grand old Church of England, and especially to the admirers of the beautiful scenery to which the spire of Ross church (so conspicuous an object since its re-erection in Bath brick) lends an indescribable charm, to come to his relief in the difficult situation in which he finds himself placed," and so on.

The above would stand as a not unfair specimen of the communications of this nature which reach me by each morning's post. All are characterized by certain unvarying features. The good folks who desire to restore their churches, build their chapels, their mission halls, and their schools, begin the work either without counting the cost, or without having any reasonable expectation of obtaining the funds they know will be required in order to complete it. They are consequently reduced to the pitiful necessity of plaguing every person to whom any sort of publicity attaches to help them out of the difficulties their own recklessness has brought them into. In prospect of the restoration of his church, ordinary considerations of prudence desert

the average parson, especially should his brethren in adjoining parishes have lately succeeded in restoring their churches. He then goes into it "baldheaded."

From the point of view of the subscriber, parsons who err from excess of caution may, however, be as objectionable as the plungers. These are the folks who circulate far and wide a neat history of the building they desire to restore, which, strange to say, is invariably an edifice marked by features of an unusually interesting character. There is a unique monument in the chancel in alabaster, supposed to represent Sybilla de Fydelstyck, the third wife of Hugh de Fydelstyck, a knight of fame in the Holy Wars, surrounded by their combined family of sixteen sons and sixteen daughters. It is supposed that the poet Shakespeare, as a boy, in a boyish freak (his youth being admittedly riotous) may have chipped off the nose (which is undoubtedly missing) of the sixteenth daughter. Possibly, too, the redoubtable Oliver may have stabled the steeds of his buff-jerkined followers in the side aisle, now used as a vestry, distinct traces of crib-biting being visible on an ancient oaken coffer therein, which may have served as a temporary manger, and so on. Appended to this circular is a list of subscribers

which bears painful evidence of repeated parsonic impotency.

	£	s.	d.
Miss Dobbs	10	0	0
Do. do. 2nd Donation	5	0	0
Do. do. 3rd do.	2	10	0
Do. do. Special Spire Fund	1	0	0
Miss Clack	5	0	0
Do. do. annually (5 years)	0	10	0
&c.			
&c.			

Applications for money for some specific object are not, however, the only appeals that reach me. I am ashamed when I think how utterly ignorant I have hitherto been of the very existence of institutions and associations of the most praiseworthy character which I am now for the first time invited to support. There is the Mad Dogs' Convalescent Home, with a long array of lady patronesses; the Harmless Idiots' (male and female) Mutual Improvement Society; the Domestic Cats' Choral Union; the Housemaids' and Christian Young Men's Sunday Out Society; the Silly Society; and those admirable and justly valued institutions, the Society for the Prevention of Women and Children, and the Society for the Propagation of Small Pox in Populous Places, which latter, I find, was awarded a gold medal at the late Health Exhibition.

It is wonderful, too, what interest a large class of public benefactors take in my health and general physical and mental well-being since I became a Member of Parliament. There is great danger, I am kindly informed, of serious injury to the lungs and bronchial tubes by sudden changes from the heated atmosphere of the House to the cooler air outside. If, however, I will but wear Dr. Dash's Nasal Protector, which is "rather ornamental than otherwise," I need be under no apprehension on this score. A "troublesome tickling in the throat" is, I am assured by one professor of the healing art, who has made diseases of the larynx his *specialité*, frequently produced by the atmospheric causes above mentioned. The remedy prescribed is a petrified pellet (containing in a concentrated form ozone and carbonic acid gas) to be placed on the base of the tongue as far back as possible, and allowed to dissolve slowly in that situation, where, I am told, that it forms "no impediment whatever to free articulation." "Relaxed or clergymen's throat" is, it seems, a malady from which even senators may suffer. It is caused, I am informed, by unequal tension of the vocal chords combined with an irritable condition of the uvula, and can be effectually cured by taking several deep inspirations daily through the patent

lung-inflator. This handy instrument, which, to judge from the accompanying diagram, would seem to be of the size and shape of a Whitehead torpedo, is highly charged with a compound which gives off a vapour exactly resembling the delightfully pure air to be found on the summit of Chimborazo. I am advised, if I would desire to address the House of Commons in a sweet, clear, resonant, ringing voice, which could not fail to penetrate into every nook and cranny of the chamber, to take six deep inspirations through the inflator just before rising to speak. I should like to address my fellow legislators in tones answering to the above description; but I do not see how I am to get the inflator into the House without incurring a suspicion of dynamite, and I am persuaded that if this preliminary difficulty were overcome, any attempt to utilize the instrument in the presence of the collective wisdom of the nation would clear the House as effectually as my own voice.

So I pass, with a shade of disappointment, from this class of correspondent and turn to another, which I would term the Class of Inquisitors. These are the gentry who are engaged in the compilation of works of a biographical character, which cannot fail to interest the present generation, and, at the

same time, be of incalculable service to the historian of the future. I am desired by one to send him a concise sketch of my life, my family, and my works, literary or otherwise, if any. He has, he adds, addressed a similar communication to my brother legislators, who have, in the majority of instances, most favourably received it. The answers he proposes to publish in an attractive form, at a price varying with the binding and general get-up of the volume. He invites my subscription to the work, and, to save me trouble, encloses an order form and a stamped and addressed envelope.

Another member of this class sends me a printed list of questions, something similar to those required to be answered by intending life-insurers. This gentleman is apparently a believer in Mr. Galton's theory of the transmissibility of mental qualities, for he institutes the most minute inquiries into my ancestry in the direct line, and, should any of my collateral relatives chance to have distinguished themselves, he would be glad to hear of them and their deeds.

One of the most simple-minded of these purveyors to human curiosity is the gentleman who is making a collection of the election addresses of members and candidates, with a view to their

publication. Possibly these compositions are about the last of their literary efforts which politicians would wish to see revived in a shape handy for reference. I did not comply with the request of this confiding individual, who, I suspect, has discovered, ere this, the unprofitable nature of his venture.

I forgot to mention in their place, which, I take it, would be among the Inventors of Petrified Pellets and Lung Inflators, the Professors of Elocution. Only two have sent their circulars to me, though I should judge, by the quantity of indifferent speech-making one is compelled to listen to, that there ought to be business enough for at least a score. One of these very two did give me some instruction many years ago, from which I might certainly have profited had I been of an age to consider the utilities. My first lesson in elocution at the hands of this gentleman often recurs to my mind. I was bidden to stand behind a desk at the end of a long class-room, and make a speech on some simple subject—freshmen, dons, senior wranglers, or the like common objects—selected offhand by our instructor. On a bench in front were some dozen or so ingenuous youths, prepared even to scoff at Demosthenes had he failed in

pebbles and taken up with preceptors. Behind them, at the opposite end of the room, stood the reverend elocutionist himself. I went through my task lamely enough, as the event proved, for, taking my place at the desk when I vacated it, our instructor, for my benefit, and to the infinite merriment of the ingenuous youths aforesaid, proceeded to give a broad, but seemingly striking, imitation of myself. He hummed and hawed as, I suppose, I hummed and hawed; he lounged inelegantly at the desk as, I suppose, I lounged; he fingered and toyed with books and small articles lying on the desk as, I suppose, I fingered and toyed with them. In fine, he illustrated my own awkwardness in so graphic a way that the picture has always remained imprinted on my mind. I remember that at the time, youth though I was, I thought the hints thus conveyed useful, and the teacher of elocution not so contemptible as some would regard him; for, returning one evening through the quadrangle of the college where the professor held his class, on some young blades at an open window striking an attitude, as was their wont when they saw us, and exclaiming in theatrical accents, "My name is Norval!" I fiercely defied them from the safe level of the court, and assured them that my name was not Norval,

nor anything like it, intelligence which, with unseemly gestures, they derided. Now-a-days the instructor most needed by Members of Parliament would be some daring soul who would teach them when not to talk.

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE PRIMROSE LEAGUE.

I REGRET that I was not in my place in Parliament when an instructive discussion took place on the political pressure exercised by the Primrose League, as I should like to have given my personal experience of the working of that tyrannical organization. I lay stress on the words "personal experience," because to judge from the reports of the speeches of the chief denouncers of the League, these gentlemen seem to have informed themselves on the subject they brought forward after the fashion of the German naturalist, who, having never seen a camel, evolved a life-like description of the animal from his inner consciousness; or of the ingenious English man of letters, who, proposing to write a treatise on Chinese metaphysics, looked up "China" and "metaphysics" in an encyclopædia and combined the information. Although, therefore, the matter was admirably handled by

those who called the attention of Parliament to it, some additional weight may be given to their arguments by the simple narration of plain facts as they have come under the notice of a practical observer. Most of the honourable members who took part in the debate in question laid stress on the social tyranny practised under the sanction of the Primrose League. I wonder at their moderation. I am clear now that they could not have spoken from personal knowledge. "Social tyranny," indeed; why, it is actual physical torture! Let a victim explain. Students of history will remember that it was an unpleasant custom of our ancestors to subject their enemies, and possibly their political opponents, to the *peine forte et dure*. This form of torture, consisted, if I mistake not, of forcing the doomed man to swallow water until he was ready to burst. Now, I aver, without fear of contradiction, that this is a common test of political principles among Primrose Leaguers; only instead of water they use tea—and such tea! Often inferior Souchong at two shillings, and frequently the coarsest Congou at sixpence less. It is at the so-called entertainments of the League, or as they are sometimes openly termed Primrose teas, that this test is imposed. Attend one of them, and you will

believe me. If on such occasions you decline the beverage altogether, you are suspected of dynamite ; if you swallow less than half-a-dozen large cupfuls, good measure, running over into the saucer, pressed upon you by winning, but withal imperious "dames," your Conservatism is regarded as blemished. The elder Mr. Weller, at the celebrated meeting of the Brick Lane Branch of the United Grand Junction Ebenezer Temperance Association, declared of one lady who had imbibed nine and a half breakfast-cups of tea, that she was "a-swellin' visibly" before his eyes. This distension of the human frame—chiefly the male human frame—owing to the cruel practice above mentioned, is fast becoming a fixed characteristic of Conservative politicians. A glance at the Ministerial benches in the House of Commons will confirm the substantial accuracy of this observation. But it is not only physical torture to which we are subjected by the Primrose League. This baleful institution works upon the mind, and after the manner of certain ascetic bodies, exposes its members to various forms of humiliation, in order to curb the unruly and reduce them to a slavish and spiritless obedience to the behests of the leaders of the League. I will give two instances in point, where I was myself the unhappy subject of this

system, and will invite you, in fancy, to accompany me to the scene, and picture it as I describe it. I am asked to deliver an address to the members of a certain "Habitation." I appear on what the lawyers call the *locus in quo*, in due course, and am welcomed by the active and intelligent secretary (all secretaries have a prescriptive right to be termed active and intelligent). "Ah, Mr. Blank," says he. "How are you? Glad you've come" (as if it had not been an arranged thing for weeks!), "awfully busy, capital meeting, we shall have a roomful. They've come to hear Melville Jones, you know." "So there is to be another speaker," I say to myself, "some local celebrity, doubtless, fully prepared to cut me out and bring down the house." I hang about in a purposeless way for a bit, as it seems to be nobody's business to pay me the slightest attention, and listen to what seems to be a kind of tuning up behind somewhere. Presently the secretary passes again. I hail him. He is a cheery man, with a pleasant wit. "Walk up, walk up, just agoin' to begin," he says with a smile, to intimate, I suppose, that the Ruling Councillor is prepared to take the chair. I control my feelings at this desecration of an occasion on which I am to deliver an oration that may, metaphorically

speaking, shake England to its core, and ask as calmly as I can, "By-the-by, what is to be the order of proceedings?" "What, haven't you a programme? Let me see" (scanning one that he takes out of his pocket), "I know you are down somewhere" (I should think so, indeed). "Oh, yes, here you are, between Letty Smith and Melville Jones!" "Letty Smith and Melville Jones!" I repeat to myself with inward bitterness and numerous suppressed notes of exclamation; then aloud, interrogatively and plaintively, for I feel that there must be something very wrong somewhere, "Miss Smith? So ladies are to speak, eh?" "Oh dear no. She sings, and a very nice girl, too. This is a sort of mixed entertainment; mixed to match the company, don't you know" (and he smirks with satisfaction at his wretched joke); "songs and speeches and that sort of thing." And it is for "that sort of thing" that for weeks past I have taxed my brains for epigrams, antitheses, flowers of rhetoric, and so on! However, I am in for it now, so I pursue my inquiries, but without any real interest in the affair. "And Thingummy Jones, what does he do?" I ask. "Oh, he's our big gun, capital fellow, comic singer, going to give us something in character, I'm told." During this

conversation I glance over the programme, and seeing that in the title of Miss Smith's song the word "love" occurs once, if not twice, I say with a shade of reproach, "I am to be sandwiched, it seems, between a sentimental singer and a comic?" "Exactly," he replies cheerily, as if he thought this an excellent joke which it was pleasant of me as well as clever to see the point of and appreciate. However, he does not ruffle me, for I am a chastened spirit now. So in due course, and humbly, as becomes the obedient instrument of an organization as powerful and as ruthless as the Inquisition, I abandon all my high hopes of swaying by winged words the destinies of an empire, and deliver a scratch speech huddled into fifteen minutes to an audience dying to hear Melville Jones in his celebrated song, "The man who went to bed in his boots."

This was a low depth to sink to, but I sank lower afterwards. For a budding statesman to contend for the favour of the crowd with a comic singer is bad enough; but to be entered for competition, so to speak, with the brute creation, is worse. Yet this happened to me once. I was to assist at a grand open-air demonstration of the League, in the West Midlands. Before the speeches began I strolled

about the ground in the company of some member of the League told off to escort me. All the rustics around were making holiday, and as we passed a group, one exclaimed, "Here er be, George, look!" It was a proud moment to be recognized, even in the wilds, and by these unsophisticated sons of the soil. I called up my best smile, the one I always use in my own constituency, and was prepared to bestow it upon them, when thus replied "George," who stood facing me, "Wheer be 'im, Bill? I doan't see 'im." I was on the point of introducing myself in an affable manner when Bill's rejoinder startled me. "Why, shure, in this eer tent, stoopid," and looking round a placard caught my eye, "Now on view, the most wonderful Natural Phenomenon in the World. Admission 2d." So this—a pig with eight legs, as it turned out, and not the future, well, say Postmaster-General (the height of my ambition at the moment shows the depth of despair to which the incident had reduced me)—was what the yokels came forth to see. The bustle drew my companion's attention to the centre of attraction. "Oh, here's the pig," he exclaimed buoyantly; "perhaps you would like to have a look at him?" I think I crushed him. "Sir," I said in tones in which grief and indignation struggled

for mastery, "if the individual" (I laid stress on this word) "so richly endowed by nature is to support me on the platform, an introduction may be advisable, otherwise I can dispense with his acquaintance. And permit me to add, sir, that I do not consider pigs and politicians to constitute a judicious mixture."

Humiliating ordeals such as these which I have just related are not imposed upon the rank and file of the League. They are tests applied only to members actively and seriously engaged in carrying out the grand objects of the institution—the restoration and perpetuation of the dark days of Tory ascendancy. Your ordinary shilling-a-year subscribers know nothing of the inquisition, the secret conclave, and the torture chamber. To them the League is an association whose political significance is subordinated to its festive character. The young folks join the Primrose League because it affords amusement, and gives them opportunities of meeting which they might otherwise be without—in a word, because it throws them together, and proximity, the adage tell us, is the soul of love. Young couples who obtain their first introduction to each other while masquerading, so to speak, as knights and dames, or damsels, of the Primrose League, would

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naturally desire further opportunities of inter-changing political sentiments. What pleasanter pastime could there be for a knight and a damsel of the League than to wander hand in hand on a fine summer's evening by the borders of some purling stream, and discuss, say, the Irish question? There are various ways, of course, of doing this. There is the parliamentary style, for example, which, if I were asked my opinion, I should not adopt on such an occasion. I should rather try something simpler and more conducive to reciprocity of feeling, say, the Kathleen Mavourneen style. However, the young people, in a case like this, may safely be trusted to select their own topic, and treat it in their own good way. I merely wish to illustrate a view of the influence of the League which has not, I think, been sufficiently considered. I have myself been at the pains to collect statistics on the subject, and find from a careful computation of the figures that my contention is amply borne out by facts. Since the establishment of the League there is conclusive proof that 33·28 per cent. more single women have been engaged to be married than was previously the case; and that of these no less than 91·042 per cent. were successfully settled; and this, after all, is the grand point—a point that often

requires a deal of leading up to. The returns as to widows are naturally more uncertain, but it may be taken generally as to them that through the agency of the League a large proportion of repairs have been promptly and satisfactorily effected.

The truth about the Primrose League has now been told. It is a secret society which retains its hold over the few by terror, and over the many by encouraging a favourite pursuit of a doubtful character, to wit, matrimony. Can we, therefore, any longer wonder at the power and popularity of this remarkable political organization !

CONSERVATISM IN THE COUNTIES.

I HAVE been staying with my distant cousin, Tony Lumpkin, down in Dampshire. For years we had lost sight of each other. He, when he succeeded to a small patrimony, the wreck of a once great estate, affected something of the country gentleman's contempt for a struggling professional man, whilst I had no mind to be snubbed by a thick-headed rustic, as I then thought fit to term him, whom the accident of birth had invested with the ownership of a few hundred acres of land and the headship of an ancient family of respectable dullards. So we had drifted apart. When, however, I became a Member of Parliament, and good Tony had recovered from the shock occasioned by the fact that a man "with nothing to recommend him but his wits," as he pleasantly put it, should have won the suffrages of an important constituency, he signified his appreciation of my success in the agreeable shape of

a woodcock and a brace of pheasants, and so we renewed our acquaintance and presently met. With much *naïveté* he assured me that he had always spoken of me as a "rising man," that since my election he had taken occasion to make some timely allusions to his "cousin the Member," with the result, as he honestly believed, of some social service to himself. Thus, it might be fancy, of course, still there was the unmistakable fact that of late his great neighbour, Sir Thomas Topsawyer, instead of his customary stare of uncertain recognition, had extended to him two aristocratic fingers, had actually said, "Ah, Lumpkin, how d'ye do?" and had looked as if he intended to inquire after his wife and family. In order, chiefly, as it seemed to me, to improve these social advantages, Lumpkin, who used to be something of a Gallio in politics, though always with a gentlemanly leaning towards Conservatism, became quite active in "the cause." He seconded a vote of thanks to the chairman at a great Conservative meeting in Potterbury, and during Mr. Gladstone's last administration he more than once openly proclaimed his belief that the country was "going to the dogs." But the Primrose League must have the credit of really eliciting the latent enthusiasm of his character. He is

seldom to be seen now without a pretty little enamelled device in his buttonhole, and Mrs. Lumpkin has quite a handsome brooch, a gift from her husband, emblazoned with the royal arms in a style that might put the College of Heralds to the blush. To the Primrose League, indeed, I am myself indebted for my visit to Dampshire. There was to be a demonstration this autumn under the auspices of the League at Babbicombe, the magnificent seat of Lord Swadlincote, the Lord Lieutenant of the county, and they were hard up for speakers; Lumpkin bethought himself of me, and hence his invitation to spend a fortnight in Dampshire, where, by way of further inducement, he added I should have the opportunity of studying the excellent system of organization which had been established by the party in the county.

It is always flattering to one's self-love to find oneself an object of interest and attention, and I own that I was gratified with the reception accorded us. It was clear that the Lumpkins desired, and I do not blame them, to make some social capital out of us. We had quite a grand dinner party of county people one day, with scarcely a clergyman among them, evidently an unusual function, to judge by the strain which the enterprise appeared

to put on the resources of the establishment. Then there was the laying of the first stone of a free library in Potterbury, a ceremony which had been purposely timed in order that I might take the principal part in it. I trust that the stability of the edifice will not depend on the accurate setting of the block of granite, which, after tapping thrice in approved fashion, I declared to be well and truly laid, for surrounded by the civic dignitaries in all their glory, the clergy in full canonicals, and the *élite* of the neighbourhood, I found my position somewhat embarrassing. It was a proud one, though, all the same; and when the proceedings culminated in the presentation of an illuminated address to me by the mayor and a bouquet to my wife by his little daughter dressed in white, I felt quite like Royalty, or, at all events, like the Marquis of Lorne.

Of course, the chief event was the demonstration. There had been some debate, it seemed, among the promoters as to the programme. A few would have preferred a mere political gathering of the ordinary type, but when Jobson, the spirited proprietor of "The Crown and Sceptre," who had hired two extra brakes for the occasion, gave it as his firm belief that if you wanted to elevate the masses you should have

"tight-rope dancing," it was felt that he had struck the true note. So there was to be a variety entertainment, brass bands, comic singers, M.P.'s, tight-rope, a balloon ascent, and fireworks, not to mention minor amusements of a baser sort, such as beer and skittles. At 5 P.M. the concert was interrupted to make way for the political addresses. The Member for the Potterbury division reviewed the "work of the Session" and left me the "Irish question." I fancied that I handled this well-worn theme with some freshness, and as I lounged round the grounds afterwards with the easy consciousness of duty well done, I encountered Lumpkin. I saw that he was jubilant, and I honestly admit that for the moment I expected a compliment on my speech. But no, he was repeating with much gusto the refrain of a comic song, which, by the way, had struck me as a trifle too suggestive for that or any occasion—

"O, he knows it,
O, she knows it,
O, they know it,
Don't you know?"

"Capital," he said, "wasn't it? Just the thing to impress the masses. I am told they have enrolled 100 new members already. It is wonderful how the cause is progressing. The Radicals haven't a

chance in this division. Besides, our organization is simply perfect. This gentleman can tell you that," and as he spoke he introduced me to a youngish man, whom I had noticed on the platform, as the secretary of the County Conservative Association. He and I had some interesting conversation. The association was admirably constituted, he told me. Lord Swadlincote was president, with a long and imposing list of vice-presidents, and Sir Thomas Topsawyer chairman of the executive committee. Their system was this; for each polling district they had a chairman, generally a country gentleman of position if they could get him, a vice-chairman, generally a substantial farmer if they could find one, and a committee composed of, well, say farmers where they could persuade them to act, small tradesmen where they could give up the time, and a sprinkling of nondescripts, little dealers, and so on, who sometimes attended when business was slack, and thus the county was mapped out in a thoroughly systematical way. What did the association and its branch committees do? Oh, the central body, of course, met quarterly, and passed the accounts and held their annual meeting besides for the election of officers and for receiving the annual report. The registration was supposed to be con-

ducted by the association, ~~but as~~ a matter of fact he and ~~two or three~~ others managed that with the assistance of the members for the county, who practically found the bulk of the money, but, of course, he reported to the association. As to the district committees, it was difficult exactly to define their duties, and, to be precise, they were not all in actual existence at that moment. It was not always easy to find the class of men you wanted, and so they had in some cases to throw two or more districts together and work them as one. Were the labouring classes represented in the association? Not so fully as he could wish, but there was certainly a better feeling among them, and here the Primrose League came in. The concerts were very popular, and so were the teas—especially with the women. How about the Press? Well, there he was bound to admit the Radicals had the pull of them. The *Potterbury Post* was the old-established Conservative organ, taken in by all the county families, and by many of the farmers, but the *Chronicle*—the Radical paper—seemed to be more popular with the people, he could not exactly say why, unless it was that it was conducted with more enterprise and spirit. But on their part they had “leaflets” which were widely distributed. He supposed they must

have given away some hundreds that day—indeed the grounds, as I ~~could see~~, were quite littered with them. Then these demonstrations ~~must have an~~ educational effect on the masses. Ah, look, there was the balloon going up now! See the name? “The Constitution.”

As we wandered in the direction of the tight-rope on which Signor Totterini, the world-renowned “equilibrist,” was shortly to exhibit his marvellous powers, the conversation turned on the new County Councils, and I asked whether the seats were likely to be fought on party lines. No, he hoped not. The difficulty would be to persuade the county gentlemen to come forward. Now, if other parts of the county would only follow the example of Potterbury all would be well. There they had great hopes that Lord Swadlincote himself would stand. True, nothing was decided, for his lordship had not yet been formally approached. The fact was, at the end of the London season his lordship had a touch of his old complaint—overstrain of the digestive organs—and had been ordered to Carlsbad for the waters. Thence his lordship had gone, as usual, north for the grouse shooting, and he was now at his place in Norfolk shooting partridges. Afterwards he would probably pay a round of visits,

ending, perhaps, with a few days in Paris, and return to Babbicombe about the second week in November, when he commonly shot his coverts for the first time. Then would be the chance to catch him, and if his lordship happened to be in the humour the affair might be satisfactorily settled. Was his lordship likely to be opposed? Well, curiously enough, there was already a candidate before the electors—a Dissenting minister of ability, who professed to stand on independent principles, but he would be supported by a good many Radicals, no doubt, and as he had taken a strong line on the temperance question, the teetotalers would vote for him, and so would the anti-vaccinationists, and the anti-vivisectionists, and the anti-squalling-brat smackers, and the rest of the large class of persons who allow their emotions to get the better of their judgment. I asked if it was not injudicious to permit this gentleman to have the field to himself so long beforehand. He thought not; Lord Swadlincote was a big fish worth waiting for, and when his lordship did come forward, his influence, and character, and standing in the county, and so on, could not fail to carry great weight.

Among the delighted gazers at the feats of Signor Totterini we found Lumpkin again, still

humming the refrain of the comic song, which he seemed to regard as a kind of substitute for the National Anthem, with the additional advantage of not being a "party tune." "Well," he said, "our friend has told you all about our organization, eh? Perfect, isn't it, and yet, would you believe it, the Radicals claim to gain largely on the registration this year, and openly boast of turning out our man at the next general election. Absurd, isn't it, in face of such a demonstration as this? Why, the fireworks alone, they say, will cost close upon £20!" Certainly the set-piece—Gladstone's portrait blown up with maroons—was very striking, and must have been a fine lesson for the young folks.

We left Dampshire next morning profoundly impressed with the prospects of Conservatism in that county. I am bound also to add that our visit, short though it was, gave me a clearer insight into my cousin's character and ability than I had previously acquired. Lumpkin, like myself, is a "progressive Conservative." He acknowledges that we must "march with the times." He is for "measures, not men." He urges the necessity of "organization," and, although satisfied with the attitude of the party in Dampshire, he would, speaking generally, like to see more "vigour and

activity" in their ranks, and less "apathy and indifference." On questioning him, I found that, although often solicited to take part in the public affairs of the locality, circumstances had hitherto stood in his way. For example, he might have been chairman of the board of guardians, but unfortunately that body always sits in the season on a hunting day. He subscribes, he told me, 10s. 6d. a year to the Conservative Association, but never attends their meetings; they hold them in the evening at such awkward hours, and, as he feelingly put it, after a certain time of life a man "misses his dinner." But his principles are sound, and he instils them into his family. He has named his stock bull "Salisbury," and his little girl who used to call her fox-terrier "Mustard" now calls him "Randy," while nothing would serve that promising pickle, Master Tony, on the day of the demonstration but he must plait the Tory colours in the mane of his favourite pony. Even the baby has her heart in the cause, and it was a daily exhibition of unflinching interest to put to her the question, "Who will be the ruin of old England?" and mark her prattling but unswerving reply, "Dadstone."

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